

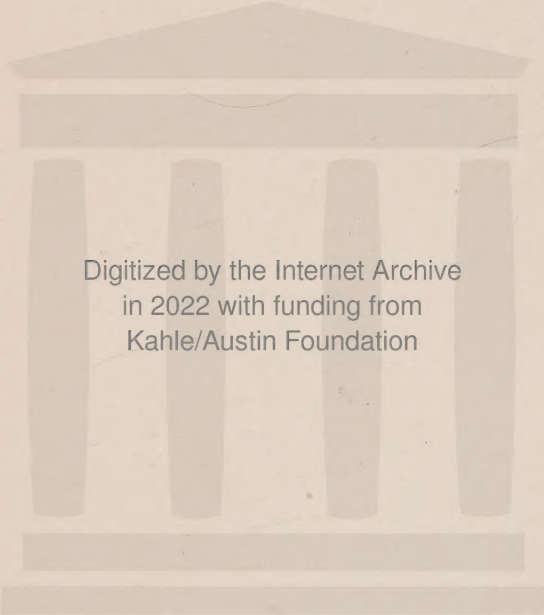
• Riverside Literature Series •

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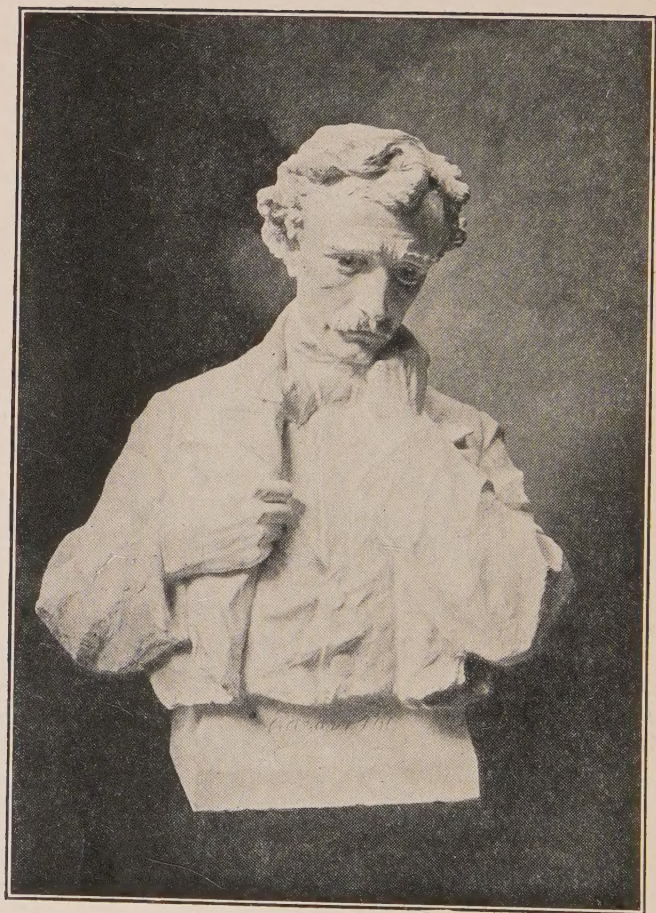
POEMS AND TALES

Edgar Allan Poe

Houghton Mifflin Co.



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Edgar A. Poe.

The Riverside Literature Series

THE RAVEN
THE FALL OF THE HOUSE OF USHER
AND OTHER POEMS AND TALES

BY
EDGAR ALLAN POE

EDITED BY
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PROFESSOR OF ENGLISH LITERATURE IN COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY



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INTRODUCTION.

THE position occupied by Poe among American authors is in many respects unique. He is generally regarded by foreign critics as, on the whole, the most original and important writer this country has produced ; yet it was possible a few years ago for thirty aspirants for literary fame to be named ahead of him in a popular ballot instituted by one of our leading critical weeklies to determine the "Best Ten American Books." He has long had enthusiastic admirers among his countrymen, but he has had an equal or greater number of detractors. Until a quite recent period the two men who had done most to extend his reputation were a Frenchman and an Englishman respectively. Some of our best critics and historians of literature have been either positively hostile to him or else exceedingly chary of their praises ; the facts of his life have been laid bare by us with little sympathy ; and there are still many cultured persons to be found among us who would affirm that Lowell treated him with perfect justice when he wrote in the *Fable for Critics* : —

"There comes Poe, with his raven, like Barnaby Rudge,
Three fifths of him genius and two fifths sheer fudge."

Which are right, the friendly or the hostile critics ? and how shall we account for their discordant judgments ? No answers to these questions can be obtained until we have made a brief examination of Poe's life and works.

Edgar Allan Poe was born in Boston, January 19, 1809, his father being an actor of good Maryland descent, his mother an actress of English extraction. The father died within a year or two and the mother before the end of 1811. Poe, with his elder brother William and his younger sister Rosalie, was left destitute in Richmond,

where the little family had been for some months objects of charity. The three children were all adopted by kind persons, Edgar being taken by Mrs. Allan, the wife of a wealthy tobacco merchant. For some years things went well with the boy, who was much petted at home and in the pleasant social circles of the small city. In 1815 the Allans went abroad, and Poe was put to school in England at Stoke Newington. Five years later the family returned, and the boy was again sent to a Richmond school, where he showed considerable linguistic and poetic ability. He gave evidence also of his shy, sensitive nature and of his predisposition to cherish morbid passions; for the first of his "Lenores," a married lady who had been kind to him, dates from this period. It was no healthy-minded youth who would visit nightly for months the grave of a woman twice his age.

In February, 1826, Poe entered the University of Virginia, which had just been opened under Jefferson's auspices. He remained for nearly a year, obtaining some distinction for his scholarship, but spending a good deal of time either in card-playing and in drinking, or else in taking long solitary tramps into the surrounding country. He alternated between recklessness and moodiness, the former laying him under the burden of heavy gambling debts, the latter confirming him in unsocial, eccentric habits. At the end of the session Mr. Allan refused to pay for his ward's losses at cards, and at once placed him in his own counting-room. The disgrace of his unpaid obligations, the irksomeness of his new employment, and the waywardness of a certain young lady's affections, drove the romantic youth to think of flight. He got to Boston in some way, and there, on May 26, 1827, enlisted in the army as Edgar A. Perry. He served first at Fort Independence, and in the summer transferred his allegiance from Mars to Apollo by publishing under the pseudonym "A Bostonian" a tiny volume entitled *Tamerlane and Other Poems*. In the autumn he was sent to Fort Moul-

trie, near Charleston, and a year later to Fortress Monroe, in Virginia. The Allans having heard of his whereabouts, and Mrs. Allan being on the point of death, he was called to Richmond, but arrived too late to see her. Mr. Allan then provided a substitute for him and secured him an appointment to West Point, where he entered on July 1, 1830, after he had previously published at Baltimore a slightly enlarged volume, this time under his own name, entitled *Al Aaraaf, Tamerlane and Minor Poems*.

For a few months Poe's record as a cadet was fairly good, but in January, 1831, he deliberately neglected all duties for a fortnight, and was therefore court-martialed and dismissed. Mr. Allan had married again and he realized that he had little to expect from that quarter; he was eager to make a start in life, and the restraints of discipline galled his spirit. He went immediately to New York and there published, again under his own name, a volume of *Poems* (1831) which was dedicated to his fellow cadets. The collection consisted of old pieces revised and of a few new poems, among the latter being *Israfel* and the lovely lyric *To Helen*.

With his dismissal from West Point Poe's life as a wayward youth ceases and his more saddening career as a wayward man begins. Up to this point he had had escapades, but he was now about to enter upon the world of men in which escapades are not possible, simply because one is not permitted to escape from the consequences of recklessness when one is coping with the grim forces of life. As we look back on it all now, we can see that his chances were desperate. He was brilliant and ambitious, but he was also morbidly sensitive and morally weak. He had doubtless inherited some deplorable qualities, he had certainly developed others through his early experience of the extremes of luxury and hardship. Perhaps no individual had dealt harshly with him, but fate had. The pleasant society of Richmond might have made a well-to-do conservative gentleman out of another nature than his;

the English scholars in Jefferson's first faculty might have trained up a worthy successor to themselves; even the rough experiences of the barracks might have had a sobering effect — but alas! not on Poe. Yet are we prepared to judge him as always faulty and not sometimes wofully unfortunate, and are we not at least bound to extend to him throughout his wayward career our heartfelt sympathies?

That career must be very briefly treated here. He settled first in Baltimore, where he tried in vain to get steady work, but where he found firm friends in his father's widowed sister, Mrs. Clemm, and her fragile young daughter, Virginia. His first bit of good fortune dates from October, 1833, when he won a prize of a hundred dollars by his story entitled the *MS. found in a Bottle*, one of a series of such compositions called *Tales of the Folio Club*. Better still, he secured the friendship of the distinguished lawyer and writer, John P. Kennedy, who helped him to get employment in connection with *The Southern Literary Messenger*, which Mr. Thomas W. White had just established in Richmond. After contributing to this magazine for a short time Poe was invited to become its assistant editor. It was an excellent chance for him, since White was a good business man and was making a success of his venture, and Poe was unquestionably well qualified for editorial work. It was not long, however, before White discerned his assistant's failing, and on the premature marriage of the latter with his young cousin Virginia, the kind-hearted publisher wrote him a letter which sufficiently disposes of those enthusiasts who would have us believe that Poe was through life the object of unjust censure. "No man is safe," wrote White, "that drinks before breakfast." No man — much less a morbid genius who had already known the ups and downs of life and had just made an impracticable marriage.

The end soon came. Poe rendered the magazine famous, especially by his tart criticisms, but by January, 1837, his

connection with it was severed. Then he removed to New York, where, a year later, the Harpers published his longest but little successful story, *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym*. After this he went to Philadelphia, where he resided for six years, subsisting as a contributor to magazines, a hack writer to booksellers, and a casual editor. He put together a manual of conchology, — not with entire credit to himself; he edited *The Gentleman's Magazine* and was discharged for negligence caused by drink; he tried to start a periodical of his own; he edited *Graham's Magazine* and was again forced to resign. All this time he was writing some of his masterpieces, — *Ligeia*, *Usher*, *The Murders in the Rue Morgue*; he had fairly established his literary reputation, he had won friends who admired both his talents and the quiet dignity of his sober hours, he had two women devoted to his welfare; but he was plainly sinking deeper and deeper into the mire on account of his inability to combat his besetting sin. It is wrong to be too severe upon him, but it is foolish to maintain that he was an ill-used and maligned man.

In the spring of 1844 Poe and his family, of which his mother-in-law Mrs. Clemm was the beneficent, guiding spirit, determined to try New York once more. Poe still believed in his own genius and in his ability to found a magazine that would make his fortune, nor would he have reckoned without his host could he but have controlled his craving for opium and drink. His *Tales of the Arabesque and Grotesque*, issued in 1840, had won wide commendation, most of the leading American writers of the time were his friends, and the public was certainly subscribing eagerly to all sorts of journals. He had wider connections probably than any of his rivals, for he was well known in the South through his relations with the *Messenger*. What he needed was capital and character, but it was as hard then as it is now to get the former without the latter. He was therefore condemned still to live by his wits, and he was glad to

form a connection with N. P. Willis, who was then editing the *Mirror*, in which journal the immortal *Raven* first appeared on January 29, 1845. He became at once the literary success of the day, his reputation grew steadily abroad, especially in France, new collections of his tales and poems were issued and admired, and last but not least he obtained a definite salary as co-editor of a new weekly, *The Broadway Journal*. But his habits led to a quarrel with his partner, Briggs, and after trying to run the paper for a while himself he was forced to abandon the enterprise and to postpone his brilliant schemes. Meanwhile he contributed to various magazines, often revamping old work, and lectured, and read his own poems with some success when he did not, as at Boston, try to palm off a youthful effusion upon his audience and then laugh at them in an ungentlemanly way. He began now to make enemies not only by such practices as these, but by indulging in indiscriminate attacks upon his contemporaries. He actually singled out the gentle Longfellow as an audacious plagiarist, — suspicion was a bane of Poe's nature, — and in his articles entitled *The Literati* he ridiculed many a small writer who now lives only in the pages of his adversary's critical writings. Yet Poe could solace himself for his unpopularity with the men by forming friendships among the numerous poetesses with whom America was then infested. He wrote most gallantly about their verses, and they repaid his attentions, in several cases, with a sort of platonic devotion. But in the midst of his struggles with poverty, his literary quarrels, his mild dalliances with femininity, a great shock came to him. His child-wife, whom he had loved with real tenderness and whom he had been condemned to see pining away in poverty and, we cannot doubt, distress of mind, finally died on January 29, 1847. His heart was deeply smitten, his body was weak from illness, his pride was wounded by the appeals that had been made for public charity; but his will was indomitable, and he wrote away at *Eureka*, a pathetic failure, and even dreamed once more of establishing his maga-

line. It is to this period that we owe *Ulalume* and *The Bells*, but even the lover of these poems, provided he is also a lover of Poe, the man, might well wish that the poet had followed his young wife speedily to the grave. The fact may as well be admitted that in the short time that elapsed between his wife's death and his own, Poe deteriorated rapidly, not merely with regard to his propensity to drink, but also with regard to his conduct with women, which cannot be described as other than maudlin. He seems to have been making love to at least three, either contemporaneously or in very quick succession, and the history of his engagements, to which some people have attributed pecuniary motives, his relapses into drinking spells, his wild regrets and expostulations, is painful in the extreme. It may be read elsewhere, but we may here set down to his credit the fact that feminine sympathy had been always a necessity to him and that women gave it him on slight provocation. It is time, however, to draw the curtain, and as we do so, we see the poor battered waif of Fortune and of Folly lying in the hospital at Baltimore writhing under the effects of the delirium induced by a long debauch, and passing away from the turmoil of earth amid the peace of an early Sabbath morning (October 7, 1849). What irony! we are tempted to exclaim; but after all it is not the irony of Poe's life that has the deepest lesson for us; it is its pathos, its ineffable sadness. Irony chiefly emerges from a comparison of the conflicting views men have taken of that life. To deny that it was worthy of condemnation on the one hand, and to treat it without sympathy on the other, might certainly serve to make us ironical as to the possibility of one finite man's taking adequate measure of the character and career of another.

Poe's friends have a less difficult task in defending his works than they have in defending his life, but they have still much to do for him in the former regard. The full importance of his position in American literature has never been widely appreciated, for several reasons. The enmities

he made and the irregular life he led have blinded many readers and even some critics to his great merits as a literary artist; the predominance of the New England school with its leaven of puritanism, against which he strove continually from both sectional and temperamental reasons, has militated against even a partial acceptance of the artistic principles for which he stood and stands; finally the general remoteness of his themes from common life has naturally limited both the force and the scope of his appeal to a people not remarkable for their cultivation of the imagination. The result has been that Poe lives for many Americans as the bizarre genius who wrote *The Raven* and three or four other curious poems, together with about half a dozen uncanny tales that one would do well not to read alone at midnight.

The reverse of all this is true of Poe's readers abroad. They have little or nothing to do with his quarrels and his irregularities; they hardly know, except in England, what puritanism means; they have inherited more or less cultivated imaginations, and they are always on the watch for whatever will bring them new sensations. It is no wonder, then, that they welcomed Poe's work eagerly, and that they continue to relish it, nor is there much reason to doubt that the view they take of his genius is the one that is destined to prevail in the poet's native land.

For whatever may be said as to the narrowness of Poe's genius, — if a genius can be called narrow that has exerted itself powerfully in the spheres of poetry, romance, and criticism, — it cannot be safely denied that he is the most original of our poets, save Whitman, and the most artistic of them all. He has extracted from a difficult language melodies precisely similar to none, and rarely surpassed. He has obtained a mastery, not yet paralleled, over certain legitimate devices and resources of his art. He has developed a few powerfully moving themes with a psychologic insight and a sureness of artistic touch that cannot be safely faulted. He has set before the capable

imagination visions of beauty that are none the less charming because they have their setting, not on earth, but in ethereal regions where he alone has lived and moved. He has contributed to the poetry of the nations verses that have appealed both to the heart of the populace and to the soul of the artist. Of no other American poet can all this be said, and although the scant body of his poetical work prevents us from regarding him as the full equal of such British masters as Byron and Wordsworth and Tennyson, we should at least be proud that his position as a classic is likely to be as undisputed as theirs.

But Poe was more than a poet; he was also a writer of imaginative prose fiction for which every claim can be made that has been made for his poetry, save only with regard to style. Poe was not a poet of sustained imagination, and just so he was neither a great novelist nor a great romancer. He cannot be coupled with Fielding or Scott any more than he can be with Milton. But at times he was a supreme master of the lyric impulse, and in prose fiction he was likewise master of the situation and the mood. He had no genius for narrating events, and if he had by any means succeeded in creating real characters he would never have been able to set them in motion. Hence it is idle to compare him with Hawthorne and Cooper, but in his own sphere of the weird situation and mood he is unrivaled, and, as with his poetry, he has been fortunate in being able to give the world at large just what it wanted and what it will probably continue to want. It is no disrespect to Cooper and Hawthorne, who have many other claims upon posterity, to hint that the Indian and the early New Englander may hereafter be less interesting than they are to-day; it is almost certain that the mysterious mansion of the Ushers, the death chamber of the Lady Rowena, and the seven gorgeous ballrooms of the Prince Prospero will never lose their sinister fascination. Poe then has been fortunate as well as great, but he has also been wonderfully versatile. Besides his weird prose-poems

he has given us the most intense portrayals of the morbid conscience in literature, and some of the most remarkable descriptions of tragic situations; he has made successful excursions into the vague border-land between the known and the unknown, between science and speculation; he practically invented and has since dominated a whole department of fiction, that of the analytic solution of mystery, better known as the detective story; and finally he has carried to the verge of human capabilities — perhaps, let us confess it, of inanity — that *tour de force* of the fancy known as the extravaganza. His work in these several spheres has not been uniform, but it has been sometimes very great. American literature would be much the poorer had not Poe written *The Black Cat*, *The Assignment*, *The Cask of Amontillado*, *A Descent into the Maelström*, *The Gold-Bug*, *The Murders in the Rue Morgue*, and *The Purloined Letter*. It is the quality of his fiction, however, not its range, that has done most to secure its wide acceptance, and that quality, except with regard to style in its technical sense, will be faulted only by those uncatholic critics who object to every theme that does not lie well within the borders of the real and the tangible. So far as technical style is concerned, it must be confessed that Poe does not show great mastery of language except in such weird prose-poems as *Usher* and *Shadow*. From this point of view his prose is distinctly inferior to his verse. He was a poet by nature and training, and in his own special sphere was a master of diction, but he was never sufficiently the real man of letters to attain the precision and beauty of a distinguished prose style. For his culture, let us frankly admit it, was superficial, and his critical faculty, in spite of the analytic character and sheer force of his intellect, was strangely limited. He lives as a critic to-day simply because, with his true literary ideals and his intense personality, he was a power for good in provincial America half a century ago. He lashed about and caused much pain both to himself and to

others, but he did good, and hence his position is secure in the history of American criticism. As literature, however, his critical work is dead, and in those of his prose writings that are immortal it is the heaven-born genius that we seek, not the trained master of language. But in his poetry the only limitation to his supremacy is the limitation set by Providence upon the range of his inspiration.

Little more need be said, for it is obviously idle to attempt to account for a genius like Poe, and it is perhaps equally idle at present to try to bridge over the chasm that separates his lovers from his detractors. Men will long continue to dispute about his life, and they will not cease to assert or to deny his greatness. It is of the very essence of his life and his genius that they should excite partisanship *pro* and *con*. But it is equally true that it is of the essence of sound criticism that, as the years go by, we should be able to judge more and more dispassionately the men and works of the past; and we may at least hope that our grandsons will be more agreed as to Poe's merits and demerits than we are. Meanwhile, it is open to his admirers to set forth, as in the preceding pages, the faith that is in them, and it is the duty of every candid student to see to it not only that the claims made are duly weighed, but also that his own personal idiosyncrasies of taste are previously chastened and controlled. For surely it is better to admire than to disparage, since the wider our literary and artistic receptivity becomes, the more certain we shall be of attaining to pleasures that are both pure and lasting.

NOTE. The student who desires to continue his work on Poe should try to obtain the complete *Works* in ten volumes published a few years since by Messrs. Stone and Kimball, under the editorship of Mr. Edmund Clarence Stedman and Professor George E. Woodberry. This edition gives the latest text (which is followed in these *Selections* through the courtesy of the publishers) together with an altogether admirable critical apparatus of introductions and notes. The memoir and the scholarly

notes are due to Professor Woodberry, while Mr. Stedman contributes three essays introductory to the tales, the criticism, and the poems, that are remarkable for their sympathy and critical acumen. The edition, which is the only complete one, is now published by Messrs. Herbert S. Stone & Co. From every point of view it is worthy of Poe, and is a credit to both editors and publishers. In addition the student should consult Professor Woodberry's scholarly and authoritative life of Poe in the *American Men of Letters* series.

It has seemed well not to attempt to follow Poe's punctuation in the tales included in these *Selections*, but to adhere to modern usage. His words, however, have been scrupulously retained even where, as on page 53, line 20, they result in faulty grammar.



THE RAVEN
THE FALL OF THE HOUSE OF USHER
AND OTHER POEMS AND TALES



POEMS.

THE RAVEN.*

ONCE upon a midnight dreary, while I pondered, weak
and weary,

Over many a quaint and curious volume of forgotten
lore, —

While I nodded, nearly napping, suddenly there came
a tapping,

As of some one gently rapping, rapping at my cham-
ber door.

“’Tis some visitor,” I muttered, “tapping at my
chamber door:

Only this and nothing more.”

* *The Raven* was first formally published in the *American Whig Review* for February, 1845, but had been copied by permission in the *Evening Mirror* for January 29, of the same year. Later in the year it was the title poem of a volume containing most of Poe's work in verse. Many stories are told with regard to the circumstances of its composition, none of which deserves much more credence than Poe's own account in his *Philosophy of Composition*, which, if taken literally, would prove the poem to be little more than a *tour de force*. Poe did probably apply, in a semi-conscious way, certain principles of style and versification that he had partly developed for himself, and he may have owed something to an obscure poet named Chivers, over and above what he owed Coleridge and Mrs. Browning; but, when all is said, the world has not been wrong in regarding *The Raven* as a highly original and powerfully moving poem, and in according it a popularity second only to that which it has long granted to Gray's *Elegy*. Like the *Elegy*,

Ah, distinctly I remember it was in the bleak Decem-
 ber,
 And each separate dying ember wrought its ghost
 upon the floor.
 Eagerly I wished the morrow ; — vainly I had sought
 to borrow
 From my books surcease of sorrow — sorrow for the
 lost Lenore, 10
 For the rare and radiant maiden whom the angels
 name Lenore :
 Nameless here for evermore.

The Raven does not in all probability represent the highest reaches of its author's art (there are lines in *Israfel*, in the lyric *To Helen*, and in the exquisite stanzas *To One in Paradise* that are unmatched in *The Raven*), but the felicitous moralizing of the one poem and the dramatic interest and weird intensity of the other abundantly justify the public in its preferences. Poe's art, too, if not seen at its highest in *The Raven*, receives therein its most adequate and characteristic expression outside of *Ula-lume*, which the public has never taken quite seriously. The student may be referred to a chapter in Professor C. A. Smith's *Repetition and Parallelism in English Verse* for full details with regard to style. Professor Smith brings out admirably Poe's kinship with the balladists, and gives a satisfactory account of his use of that time-honored poetic artifice, the repetend, — an artifice which is as plainly seen in the

Abstineas avidas, Mors precor atra, manus.
 Abstineas, Mors atra, precor,

of Tibullus (El. I, iii.) as in any stanza of *The Raven*.

10. Bürger wrote a ballad of *Lenore* from which Poe may have got this name. The idea of celebrating, whether in verse or in melancholy sentiment, the death of a beautiful young woman seems to have been with him from boyhood, and in his manhood he maintained that such a subject "is, unquestionably, the most poetical topic in the world." It was so for him, at any rate, both in his verse and in his prose-poems such as *Ligeia* and *Eleonora*.

And the silken sad uncertain rustling of each purple
curtain

Thrilled me — filled me with fantastic terrors never
felt before ;

So that now, to still the beating of my heart, I stood
repeating 15

“ ’T is some visitor entreating entrance at my chamber
door,

Some late visitor entreating entrance at my chamber
door :

This it is and nothing more.”

Presently my soul grew stronger ; hesitating then no
longer,

“ Sir,” said I, “ or Madam, truly your forgiveness I
implore ; 20

But the fact is I was napping, and so gently you came
rapping,

And so faintly you came tapping, tapping at my
chamber door,

That I scarce was sure I heard you ” — here I opened
wide the door : —

Darkness there and nothing more.

Deep into that darkness peering, long I stood there
wondering, fearing, 25

Doubting, dreaming dreams no mortals ever dared to
dream before :

But the silence was unbroken, and the stillness gave
no token,

And the only word there spoken was the whispered
word, “ Lenore ? ”

This I whispered, and an echo murmured back the
word, “ Lenore : ”

Merely this and nothing more. 30

Back into the chamber turning, all my soul within me
burning,

Soon again I heard a tapping somewhat louder than
before.

“Surely,” said I, “surely that is something at my
window lattice;

Let me see, then, what thereat is, and this mystery
explore;

Let my heart be still a moment and this mystery
explore: 35

’Tis the wind and nothing more.”

Open here I flung the shutter, when, with many a
flirt and flutter,

In there stepped a stately Raven of the saintly days of
yore.

Not the least obeisance made he; not a minute stopped
or stayed he;

But, with mien of lord or lady, perched above my
chamber door, 40

Perched upon a bust of Pallas just above my chamber
door:

Perched, and sat, and nothing more.

Then this ebony bird beguiling my sad fancy into
smiling

By the grave and stern decorum of the countenance it
wore, —

“Though thy crest be shorn and shaven, thou,” I
said, “art sure no craven, 45

45. By this and other touches Poe intended, as he tells us, to give his verses, for the sake of contrast, “an air of the fantastic, approaching as nearly to the ludicrous as was admissible.” That the Raven, though shorn like a monk, was no coward is made evident by his cavalier entrance into an unknown place.

Ghastly grim and ancient Raven wandering from the
Nightly shore :

Tell me what thy lordly name is on the Night's Plu-
tonian shore ! ”

Quoth the Raven, “ Nevermore.”

Much I marvelled this ungainly fowl to hear discourse
so plainly,

Though its answer little meaning — little relevancy
bore ; 50

For we cannot help agreeing that no living human
being

Ever yet was blessed with seeing bird above his
chamber door,

Bird or beast upon the sculptured bust above his
chamber door,

With such name as “ Nevermore.”

But the Raven, sitting lonely on the placid bust,
spoke only 55

That one word, as if his soul in that one word he did
outpour,

Nothing further then he uttered, not a feather then
he fluttered,

Till I scarcely more than muttered, — “ Other friends
have flown before ;

On the morrow *he* will leave me, as my Hopes have
flown before.”

Then the bird said, “ Nevermore.” 60

47. Pluto was god of Hades — of the infernal regions — hence the epithet conveys the ideas of darkness and mystery. Cf. Horace, *Carm.* I, iv.: “ Et domus exilis Plutonia.”

49. Ravens make very intelligent pets (cf. *Barnaby Rudge*) and can be taught to imitate speech somewhat. As an omen of ill fortune the bird figures frequently in English literature from

Startled at the stillness broken by reply so aptly
 spoken,
 "Doubtless," said I, "what it utters is its only stock
 and store,
 Caught from some unhappy master whom unmerciful
 Disaster
 Followed fast and followed faster till his songs one
 burden bore :
 Till the dirges of his Hope that melancholy burden
 bore

66

Of 'Never — nevermore.'"

But the Raven still beguiling all my fancy into smiling,
 Straight I wheeled a cushioned seat in front of bird
 and bust and door ;
 Then, upon the velvet sinking, I betook myself to
 linking
 Fancy unto fancy, thinking what this ominous bird of
 yore,

70

What this grim, ungainly, ghastly, gaunt, and ominous
 bird of yore
 Meant in croaking "Nevermore."

This I sat engaged in guessing, but no syllable ex-
 pressing
 To the fowl whose fiery eyes now burned into my
 bosom's core ;
 This and more I sat divining, with my head at ease
 reclining

75

On the cushion's velvet lining that the lamp-light
 gloated o'er,

the time of the Anglo Saxon poets, who continually refer to it in their martial verses.

64. *Burden* = refrain.

76. That is, cast a sidelong ray over, — unless Poe wished to

But whose velvet violet lining with the lamp-light
gloating o'er

She shall press, ah, nevermore!

Then, methought, the air grew denser, perfumed from
an unseen censer

Swung by seraphim whose foot-falls tinkled on the
tufted floor. 80

“Wretch,” I cried, “thy God hath lent thee — by
these angels he hath sent thee

Respite — respite and nepenthe from thy memories of
Lenore!

Quaff, oh quaff this kind nepenthe, and forget this
lost Lenore!”

Quoth the Raven, “Nevermore.”

“Prophet!” said I, “thing of evil! prophet still, if
bird or devil! 85

Whether Tempter sent, or whether tempest tossed thee
here ashore,

Desolate yet all undaunted, on this desert land en-
chanted —

On this home by Horror haunted — tell me truly, I
implore:

Is there — is there balm in Gilead? — tell me — tell
me, I implore!”

Quoth the Raven, “Nevermore.” 90

attribute to the light some furtive or sinister character. From
any point of view the use of the word is rather questionable.

83. **Nepenthe**, a “sorrow-dispelling” drink mentioned in the
Odyssey (iv. 219–30). Cf. *Comus*, ll. 675–6: —

“That Nepenthes which the wife of Thone
In Egypt gave to Jove-born Helena.”

89. **Balm in Gilead**. See *Century Dictionary* and cf. *Jerem-
iah* viii. 22: “Is there no balm in Gilead? is there no physi-
cian there?”

“Prophet !” said I, “thing of evil — prophet still, if
bird or devil !

By that Heaven that bends above us, by that God we
both adore,

Tell this soul with sorrow laden if, within the distant
Aidenn,

It shall clasp a sainted maiden whom the angels name
Lenore :

Clasp a rare and radiant maiden whom the angels
name Lenore !”

95

Quoth the Raven, “Nevermore.”

“Be that word our sign of parting, bird or fiend !” I
shrieked, upstarting :

“Get thee back into the tempest and the Night’s Plu-
tonian shore !

Leave no black plume as a token of that lie thy soul
hath spoken !

Leave my loneliness unbroken ! quit the bust above
my door !

100

Take thy beak from out my heart, and take thy form
from off my door !”

Quoth the Raven, “Nevermore.”

And the Raven, never flitting, still is sitting, still is
sitting

On the pallid bust of Pallas just above my chamber
door ;

93. *Aidenn*, some distant place of pleasure, — Eden or Aden,
of which it is a fanciful variant.

96. Poe tells us in his curious account of the evolution of his
poem that this stanza was the first that he wrote out.

101. “It will be observed,” says Poe, “that the words ‘from
out my heart’ involve the first metaphorical expression in the
poem. . . . The reader begins now to regard the Raven as em-
blematical” [“of *Mournful and Never-ending Remembrance*”].

And his eyes have all the seeming of a demon's that
 is dreaming, 105
 And the lamp-light o'er him streaming throws his
 shadow on the floor :
 And my soul from out that shadow that lies floating
 on the floor
 Shall be lifted — nevermore !

LENORE.*

AH, broken is the golden bowl ! the spirit flown for-
 ever !
 Let the bell toll ! — a saintly soul floats on the Sty-
 gian river ;
 And, Guy De Vere, hast *thou* no tear ? — weep now or
 nevermore !
 See, on yon drear and rigid bier low lies thy love,
 Lenore !

* *Lenore* is perhaps the best example of Poe's success in amend-
 ing his verses by constant experiment, as well as of his pertina-
 city in clinging to a subject that suited him. We have already
 seen that he thought the death of a beautiful young woman
 the most poetic of all themes, so we are not surprised to find
 the nucleus of *Lenore* in the stanzas entitled *A Pæan*, first pub-
 lished in the collection of 1831. *Lenore* itself appeared in the
Pioneer for February, 1843. The text here given follows the
 Lorimer Graham copy of the edition of 1845, which contains
 marginal corrections in Poe's hand. For a comparison of the
 various readings see *Works*, X, pp. 166–170. The poem has long
 been popular and well represents Poe's use of poetic artifices.

1. Cf. Ecclesiastes xii. 6 : "Or ever the silver cord be loosed,
 or the golden bowl be broken."

2. The Styx (that is, the abhorred), the principal river of
 Hades.

Come, let the burial rite be read — the funeral song
 be sung : 5

An anthem for the queenliest dead that ever died so
 young,

A dirge for her the doubly dead in that she died so
 young.

“Wretches, ye loved her for her wealth and hated her
 for her pride,

And when she fell in feeble health, ye blessed her —
 that she died !

How *shall* the ritual, then, be read ? the requiem how
 be sung 10

By you — by yours, the evil eye, — by yours, the
 slanderous tongue

That did to death the innocence that died, and died
 so young ? ”

Peccavimus; but rave not thus ! and let a Sabbath
 song

Go up to God so solemnly the dead may feel no
 wrong.

The sweet Lenore hath gone before, with Hope that
 flew beside, 15

Leaving thee wild for the dear child that should have
 been thy bride :

For her, the fair and debonair, that now so lowly lies,

10. The student should consult some good dictionary as to the meaning of the various poetical and musical terms here used.

13. *Peccavimus*, literally, “We have sinned.” The singular, “*peccavi*,” is frequently found.

17. *Debonair*, of gentle mien, — from the Old French *de bon aire*.

“So buxom, blithe, and debonair.”

MILTON, *L'Allegro*

The life upon her yellow hair but not within her
eyes ;

The life still there, upon her hair — the death upon
her eyes.

“Avaunt! avaunt! from fiends below, the indignant
ghost is riven — 20

From Hell unto a high estate far up within the
Heaven —

From grief and groan, to a golden throne, beside the
King of Heaven!

Let no bell toll, then, — lest her soul, amid its hallowed
mirth,

Should catch the note as it doth float up from the
damnèd Earth!

And I! — to-night my heart is light! — no dirge will
I upraise, 25

But waft the angel on her flight with a Pæan of old
days.”

ULALUME.*

THE skies they were ashen and sober ;

The leaves they were crispèd and sere,

The leaves they were withering and sere ;

20. The verses of this stanza were considerably transposed and improved by Poe, and so the whole differs from the text of 1845, which is usually given.

* *Ulalume* first appeared in the *American Whig Review* for December, 1847. It may fairly be regarded as the *cruz* of Poe's poetry. Many readers, who do not pretend to understand it, have been fascinated by its diction and rhythm and by the charm of its unchecked mysticism, and it has been even known to appeal to men who care little for any other poetry. But there have also been many readers who have not hesitated to pro-

It was night in the lonesome October
 Of my most immemorial year;
 It was hard by the dim lake of Auber,
 In the misty mid region of Weir:
 It was down by the dank tarn of Auber,
 In the ghoul-haunted woodland of Weir.

Here once, through an alley Titanic 10
 Of cypress, I roamed with my Soul —
 Of cypress, with Psyche, my Soul.
 These were days when my heart was volcanic
 As the scoriac rivers that roll,
 As the lavas that restlessly roll 15
 Their sulphurous currents down Yaanek
 In the ultimate climes of the pole,

nounce it melodious nonsense. The truth seems to lie with the admirers of the poem. Its content of concrete meaning is quite small, — its tangible theme being, probably, a mere *contre-temps* that happens to a bereaved but possibly consolable husband, such as Poe was when he wrote it, — but perhaps never in the history of literature has so slight a theme been more amazingly evolved into a masterpiece of diction and rhythm that makes up for its lack of appeal to the understanding by the profundity of its appeal to the emotions. From the latter point of view, at least, *Ulalume* is a great poem in which its author's peculiar genius finds its most characteristic and complete expression.

5. Poe means that the sorrows of the year have made it seem of practically unknown duration, placed it outside the domain of memory.

6, 7. These geographical names are all fictitious. The student will note their euphony and the weird effect produced by their unfamiliarity.

9. **Ghoul-haunted** — haunted by evil beings supposed by Oriental peoples to devour corpses.

12. **Psyche** is the Greek for *soul*.

14. **Scoriac**. Explained by the parallel expression "the lavas." The word is rare.

That groan as they roll down Mount Yaanek
In the realms of the boreal pole.

Our talk had been serious and sober, 26
But our thoughts they were palsied and sere,
Our memories were treacherous and sere,
For we knew not the month was October,
And we marked not the night of the year,
(Ah, night of all nights in the year!) 28
We noted not the dim lake of Auber
(Though once we had journeyed down here),
Remembered not the dank tarn of Auber
Nor the ghoul-haunted woodland of Weir.

And now, as the night was senescent 30
And star-dials pointed to morn,
As the star-dials hinted of morn,
At the end of our path a liquescent
And nebulous lustre was born,
Out of which a miraculous crescent 35
Arose, with a duplicate horn,
Astarte's bediamonded crescent
Distinct with its duplicate horn.

And I said — "She is warmer than Dian :
She rolls through an ether of sighs, 40
She revels in a region of sighs :

19. Generally speaking *boreal* means *northern*, from Boreas, the north wind. But Poe's imagination usually turned to the South Pole, so that it seems possible that he was following the French terminology, in which "boreal pole" is that pole of the magnetic needle which points to the South. The whole expression would then be equivalent to "Antarctic regions."

37. Astarte was the principal female divinity of the Phenicians — goddess of the moon (as here) or of the heavens. Dian corresponds to her in Roman mythology, and Artemis in

She has seen that the tears are not dry on
 These cheeks, where the worm never dies,
 And has come past the stars of the Lion
 To point us the path to the skies,
 To the Lethean peace of the skies :
 Come up, in despite of the Lion,
 To shine on us with her bright eyes :
 Come up through the lair of the Lion,
 With love in her luminous eyes."

45

50

But Psyche, uplifting her finger,
 Said — "Sadly this star I mistrust,
 Her pallor I strangely mistrust :
 Oh, hasten ! — oh, let us not linger !
 Oh, fly ! — let us fly ! — for we must."
 In terror she spoke, letting sink her
 Wings until they trailed in the dust ;
 In agony sobbed, letting sink her
 Plumes till they trailed in the dust,
 Till they sorrowfully trailed in the dust.

55

60

I replied — "This is nothing but dreaming :
 Let us on by this tremulous light !
 Let us bathe in this crystalline light !
 Its sibyllic splendor is beaming
 With hope and in beauty to-night :
 See, it flickers up the sky through the night !

65

Greek. The "miraculous crescent" is, perhaps, symbolical of some new love influence dawning on the poet's life.

44. **The Lion**, the ancient constellation *Leo*. Poe's mythopoetic faculty is at its full height in this stanza.

46. **Lethean**, that is, which causes forgetfulness. *Lethe* was a river of Hades, the waters of which had the power of inducing in the drinker oblivion of his former life.

64. **Sibyllic**, mysterious, like a sibyl (see *Classical Dictionary*). The word is rare, "sibylline" being preferred.

Ah, we safely may trust to its gleaming,
 And be sure it will lead us aright:
 We safely may trust to a gleaming
 That cannot but guide us aright, 70
 Since it flickers up to Heaven through the night."

Thus I pacified Psyche and kissed her,
 And tempted her out of her gloom,
 And conquered her scruples and gloom;
 And we passed to the end of the vista, 75
 But were stopped by the door of a tomb,
 By the door of a legended tomb;
 And I said — "What is written, sweet sister,
 On the door of this legended tomb?"
 She replied — "Ulalume — Ulalume — 80
 'T is the vault of thy lost Ulalume!"

Then my heart it grew ashen and sober
 As the leaves that were crispèd and sere,
 As the leaves that were withering and sere,
 And I cried — "It was surely October 85
 On this very night of last year
 That I journeyed — I journeyed down here,
 That I brought a dread burden down here:
 On this night of all nights in the year,
 Ah, what demon has tempted me here? 90
 Well I know, now, this dim lake of Auber,
 This misty mid region of Weir:
 Well I know, now, this dank tarn of Auber,
 This ghoul-haunted woodland of Weir."

77. That is, the tomb has an inscription upon it that may be read; it is too recent to have *legends told* about it.

86. This verse and one or two others seem to introduce a prosaic element which may have given Bret Harte courage to write his remarkable parody of the poem.

THE BELLS.*

I.

HEAR the sledges with the bells,
 Silver bells!
 What a world of merriment their melody foretells!
 How they tinkle, tinkle, tinkle,
 In the icy air of night!
 While the stars, that oversprinkle
 All the heavens, seem to twinkle
 With a crystalline delight;
 Keeping time, time, time,
 In a sort of Runic rhyme,
 To the tintinnabulation that so musically wells
 From the bells, bells, bells, bells,
 Bells, bells, bells —
 From the jingling and the tinkling of the bells.

19

* *The Bells* first appeared in *Sartain's Union Magazine* for November, 1849. It seems to have been evolved out of two stanzas suggested to Poe by a lady to whom he complained that he had a poem to write, but was without a subject and was annoyed by the sound of the neighboring church bells. A passage from Chateaubriand's *Genius of Christianity* may perhaps have induced him to think that the subject given him was capable of poetic treatment. (See *Works*, X, pp. 182-186.) Be this as it may, and whether or not Schiller's *Song of the Bell* occurred to his mind, Poe succeeded in elaborating one of the most musical poems in literature and in surpassing the onomatopoetic efforts of rivals like Southey in his famous verses on the cataract at Lodore. The ideas called up by the poem are commonplace enough, but its popularity is insured by its incomparable melody.

10. Runes were letters or characters used by the peoples of northern Europe. In them short, mystic sentences and rhymes were often couched, — hence a "runic rhyme" is one more or less mystical or obscure in expression.

II.

Hear the mellow wedding bells, 15
Golden bells!

What a world of happiness their harmony foretells!
Through the balmy air of night
How they ring out their delight!

From the molten-golden notes, 20
And all in tune,

What a liquid ditty floats,
To the turtle-dove that listens, while she gloats
On the moon!

Oh, from out the sounding cells, 25
What a gush of euphony voluminously wells!
How it swells!
How it dwells

On the Future! how it tells
Of the rapture that impels 30

To the swinging and the ringing
Of the bells, bells, bells,
Of the bells, bells, bells, bells,
Bells, bells, bells —

To the rhyming and the chiming of the bells! 35

III.

Hear the loud alarum bells,
Brazen bells!

What a tale of terror, now, their turbulency tells!
In the startled ear of night

How they scream out their affright! 40

Too much horrified to speak,
They can only shriek, shriek,

Out of tune,

In a clamorous appealing to the mercy of the fire,
In a mad expostulation with the deaf and frantic
fire, 45

Leaping higher, higher, higher,
 With a desperate desire,
 And a resolute endeavor
 Now — now to sit or never,
 By the side of the pale-faced moon. 50
 Oh, the bells, bells, bells!
 What a tale their terror tells
 Of Despair!
 How they clang, and clash, and roar!
 What a horror they outpour 55
 On the bosom of the palpitating air!
 Yet the ear it fully knows,
 By the twanging
 And the clanging,
 How the danger ebbs and flows; 60
 Yet the ear distinctly tells,
 In the jangling
 And the wrangling,
 How the danger sinks and swells,
 By the sinking or the swelling in the anger of the
 bells, 65
 Of the bells,
 Of the bells, bells, bells, bells,
 Bells, bells, bells —
 In the clamor and the clangor of the bells!

IV.

Hear the tolling of the bells, 70
 Iron bells!
 What a world of solemn thought their monody com-
 pels!
 In the silence of the night
 How we shiver with affright
 At the melancholy menace of their tone! 75

For every sound that floats
 From the rust within their throats
 Is a groan.

And the people — ah, the people,
 They that dwell up in the steeple,
 All alone,

And who tolling, tolling, tolling
 In that muffled monotone,
 Feel a glory in so rolling

 On the human heart a stone —
 They are neither man nor woman,
 They are neither brute nor human,
 They are Ghouls :

 And their king it is who tolls ;
 And he rolls, rolls, rolls,
 Rolls

 A pæan from the bells ;
 And his merry bosom swells
 With the pæan of the bells,
 And he dances, and he yells :
 Keeping time, time, time,
 In a sort of Runic rhyme,
 To the pæan of the bells,
 Of the bells :

Keeping time, time, time,
 In a sort of Runic rhyme,
 To the throbbing of the bells,
 Of the bells, bells, bells —
 To the sobbing of the bells ;
 Keeping time, time, time,
 As he knells, knells, knells,

92. **Pæan**, originally a hymn of thanksgiving or a song for help to Apollo, the healer, — now any song of triumph and joy.

In a happy Runic rhyme,
 To the rolling of the bells,
 Of the bells, bells, bells :
 To the tolling of the bells,
 Of the bells, bells, bells, bells,
 Bells, bells, bells —
 To the moaning and the groaning of the bells.

119

ANNABEL LEE.*

It was many and many a year ago,
 In a kingdom by the sea,
 That a maiden there lived whom you may know
 By the name of ANNABEL LEE ;
 And this maiden she lived with no other thought
 Than to love and be loved by me.

5

I was a child and she was a child,
 In this kingdom by the sea,
 But we loved with a love that was more than love,
 I and my ANNABEL LEE ;
 With a love that the wingèd seraphs of heaven
 Coveted her and me.

10

And this was the reason that, long ago,
 In this kingdom by the sea,
 A wind blew out of a cloud, chilling
 My beautiful ANNABEL LEE ;

15

* *Annabel Lee* first appeared in the *New York Tribune* for October 9, 1849. The poem has long shared the popularity of *The Raven* and *The Bells*, chiefly on account of its exquisite rhythm, its deep sincerity, and its touch of romantic mysticism.

So that her highborn kinsman came
And bore her away from me,
To shut her up in a sepulchre
In this kingdom by the sea.

26

The angels, not half so happy in heaven,
Went envying her and me ;
Yes! that was the reason (as all men know,
In this kingdom by the sea)
That the wind came out of the cloud by night,
Chilling and killing my ANNABEL LEE.

28

But our love it was stronger by far than the love
Of those who were older than we,
Of many far wiser than we ;
And neither the angels in heaven above,
Nor the demons down under the sea,
Can ever dissever my soul from the soul
Of the beautiful ANNABEL LEE :

30

For the moon never beams, without bringing me
dreams
Of the beautiful ANNABEL LEE ,
And the stars never rise, but I feel the bright eyes
Of the beautiful ANNABEL LEE ;
And so, all the night-tide, I lie down by the side
Of my darling — my darling — my life and my bride,
In her sepulchre there by the sea,
In her tomb by the sounding sea.

35

40

33. These lines probably represent the highest reach of poetic passion that Poe was capable of.

ISRAFEL.*

IN Heaven a spirit doth dwell
 Whose heart-strings are a lute;
 None sing so wildly well
 As the angel Israfel,
 And the giddy stars (so legends tell)
 Ceasing their hymns, attend the spell
 Of his voice, all mute.

Tottering above
 In her highest noon,
 The enamored moon
 Blushes with love,
 While, to listen, the red levin
 (With the rapid Pleiads, even,
 Which were seven)
 Pauses in Heaven. 1

C. 10

15

* *Israfel* was first published in the collection of 1831, but was much elaborated and improved before it took final form. Poe's control over the subtler beauties of his art is nowhere more definitely shown, and Mr. Stedman is clearly right in maintaining that the more the poem is studied the rarer it seems. "The lyric phrasing is minstrelsy throughout—the soul of nature mastering a human voice." It may be doubted whether even in the lyrics of Shelley, which certainly influenced Poe, there is to be found any more complete expression of the highest poetic rapture than is contained in several of these stanzas.

4. Poe's own motto runs: "And the angel Israfel, whose heart-strings are a lute, and who has the sweetest voice of all God's creatures. KORAN." [Really from Sale's *Preliminary Discourse*, iv. 71, through Moore's *Lalla Rookh*. The phrase "whose heart-strings," etc., was interpolated by Poe.]

12. *Levin*, better spelt "leven,"—an obsolete word for lightning.

14. Only six of these stars are conspicuous, hence the legend of the Lost Pleiad. See *Harper's Classical Dictionary*.

And they say (the starry choir
 And the other listening things)
 That Israfeli's fire
 Is owing to that lyre
 By which he sits and sings, 20
 The trembling living wire
 Of those unusual strings.

But the skies that angel trod,
 Where deep thoughts are a duty,
 Where Love's a grown-up God, 25
 Where the Houri glances are
 Imbued with all the beauty
 Which we worship in a star.

Therefore thou art not wrong,
 Israfeli, who despisest 30
 An unimpassioned song;
 To thee the laurels belong,
 Best bard, because the wisest:
 Merrily live, and long!

The ecstasies above 35
 With thy burning measures suit:
 Thy grief, thy joy, thy hate, thy love,
 With the fervor of thy lute:
 Well may the stars be mute!

Yes, Heaven is thine; but this 40
 Is a world of sweets and sour;
 Our flowers are merely — flowers,

26. The houris are nymphs of paradise, according to the Mohammedans, beautiful, immortal virgins who attend upon the faithful after death.

And the shadow of thy perfect bliss
Is the sunshine of ours.

If I could dwell

15

Where Israfel

Hath dwelt, and he where I,
He might not sing so wildly well

A mortal melody,

While a bolder note than this might swell 50
From my lyre within the sky.

TO HELEN.*

HELEN, thy beauty is to me

Like those Nicæan barks of yore,
That gently, o'er a perfumed sea,
The weary, wayworn wanderer bore
To his own native shore. 5

On desperate seas long wont to roam,
Thy hyacinth hair, thy classic face,

51. Compare with the close of Shelley's *Skylark*.

* These beautiful stanzas (which may be confounded unfortunately with another of Poe's best poems bearing the same name) were first published in the collection of 1831.

2. What Poe means by *Nicæan* is a matter of doubt. None of the classical *Nicæas* will fit the passage, but if "the weary, wayworn wanderer" is Ulysses, as seems most likely, the adjective is either intentionally or unintentionally substituted for *Phæacian* — cf. *Odyssey* VI.-VIII. The Phæacians did have marvelous ships and they did convey Ulysses to Ithaca. If, however, no specific wanderer is meant, the present editor can but surmise that Poe was not troubling himself about the actual meaning of the epithet he employed.

7. "The raven-black, the glossy, the luxuriant and naturally-

Thy Naiad airs, have brought me home
 To the glory that was Greece
 And the grandeur that was Rome.

10

Lo ! in yon brilliant window-niche
 How statue-like I see thee stand,
 The agate lamp within thy hand !
 Ah, Pysche, from the regions which
 Are Holy Land !

15

TO ONE IN PARADISE.*

THOU wast all that to me, love,
 For which my soul did pine :
 A green isle in the sea, love,
 A fountain and a shrine
 All wreathed with fairy fruits and flowers, 5
 And all the flowers were mine.

Ah, dream too bright to last !
 Ah, starry Hope, that didst arise

earling tresses, setting forth the full force of the Homeric epithet, 'hyacinthine.'" *Ligeia*. It is perhaps pedantic to point out that "hyacinthine" is not, strictly speaking, a Homeric epithet.

8. Naiads were young and beautiful virgins who in Greek mythology presided over rivers, springs, and fountains.

9, 10. Two of the best known and finest of Poe's lines.

* These stanzas, which were published several times with considerable variations, seem first to have seen the light as verses inserted in the tale entitled *The Visionary* (now *The Assignment*) in *Godey's Lady's Book* for January, 1834. As now printed in the tale they are supplied with a concluding stanza which adds nothing to the beauty of the poem, — a beauty which can be better felt than described.

But to be overcast!

A voice from out the Future cries, 10
“On! on!” — but o’er the Past
(Dim gulf!) my spirit hovering lies
Mute, motionless, aghast.

For, alas! alas! with me

The light of Life is o’er! 15
No more — no more — no more —
(Such language holds the solemn sea
To the sands upon the shore)
Shall bloom the thunder-blasted tree,
Or the stricken eagle soar. 20

And all my days are trances,

And all my nightly dreams
Are where thy gray eye glances,
And where thy footstep gleams —
In what ethereal dances, 25
By what eternal streams.

TALES.

A DESCENT INTO THE MAELSTRÖM.¹

“The ways of God in Nature, as in Providence, are not as *our* ways, nor are the models that we frame any way commensurate to the vastness, profundity, and unsearchableness of His works, *which have a depth in them greater than the well of Democritus.*” JOSEPH GLANVILL.²

WE had now reached the summit of the loftiest crag. For some minutes the old man seemed too much exhausted to speak.

¹ *A Descent into the Maelström* — distinctly the most realistic and exciting of the Tales of Pseudo-Science — was first published in *Graham's Magazine* for May, 1841. It was the third of the series, having been preceded by the *MS. Found in a Bottle* and by *Hans Pfall*. Its sheer imaginative power lifts it out of the class of compositions to which it belongs, — which if Poe did not originate, he nevertheless did much to popularize, — and makes it literature in a very real and true sense. This success is probably due to the fact that in no other tale does Poe so thoroughly fuse his power of analysis and his power of depicting a situation.

² This motto, which, as is not unusual with Poe, is incorrectly given, has been found by Professor Woodberry in Glanvill's *Essays on Several Important Subjects in Philosophy and Religion*, London, 1676. Glanvill (or Glauvil) was born in 1636 and died in 1680. He was a clergyman noted for his philosophical writings, of which the *Vanity of Dogmatizing* and a book on Sorcery are best known. The latter is discussed by Lecky in his great work on Rationalism; the former furnished Matthew Arnold with the basis of his *Scholar Gypsy*. The Democritus referred to in the motto is of course the famous “laughing philosopher” of Abdera (born about 490 B. C.), who is better known for his constant ridicule of the follies of humanity than for his advocacy of an atomic theory. The phrase “well of Democritus” is perhaps due to Cicero. See *De Natura Deorum*, i. 43, 120.

“Not long ago,” said he at length, “and I could have guided you on this route as well as the youngest of my sons ; but, about three years past, there happened to me an event such as never happened before to mortal man, — or at least such as no man ever survived to tell of, — and the six hours of deadly terror which I then endured have broken me up body and soul. You suppose me a *very* old man, but I am not. It took less than a single day to change these hairs¹ from a jetty black to white, to weaken my limbs, and to unstring my nerves, so that I tremble at the least exertion, and am frightened at a shadow. Do you know I can scarcely look over this little cliff without getting giddy ?”

The “little cliff,” upon whose edge he had so carelessly thrown himself down to rest that the weightier portion of his body hung over it, while he was only kept from falling by the tenure of his elbow on its extreme and slippery edge, — this “little cliff” arose, a sheer unobstructed precipice of black shining rock, some fifteen or sixteen hundred feet from the world of crags beneath us. Nothing would have tempted me to within half a dozen yards of its brink. In truth, so deeply was I excited by the perilous position of my companion, that I fell at full length upon the ground, clung to the shrubs around me, and dared not even glance upward at the sky, while I struggled in vain to divest myself of the idea that the very foundations of the mountain were in danger from the fury of the winds. It was long before I could reason myself into sufficient courage to sit up and look out into the distance.

“You must get over these fancies,” said the guide,

¹ Cf. the opening lines of Byron's *Prisoner of Chillon*.

“for I have brought you here that you might have the best possible view of the scene of that event I mentioned, and to tell you the whole story with the spot just under your eye.”

“We are now,” he continued, in that particularizing manner which distinguished him, — “we are now close upon the Norwegian coast, in the sixty-eighth degree of latitude, in the great province of Nordland, and in the dreary district of Lofoden. The mountain upon whose top we sit is Helseggen the Cloudy.¹ Now raise yourself up a little higher — hold on to the grass if you feel giddy — so — and look out, beyond the belt of vapor beneath us, into the sea.”

I looked dizzily, and beheld a wide expanse of ocean, whose waters wore so inky a hue as to bring at once to my mind the Nubian geographer’s account of the *Mare Tenebrarum*.² A panorama more deplorably desolate no human imagination can conceive. To the right and left, as far as the eye could reach, there lay outstretched, like ramparts of the world, lines of horridly black and beetling cliff, whose character of

¹ The student will do well to turn to a good map of Norway and examine the region described. The Lofoden (or Lofoten) “district” is really a chain of mountainous islands skirting westwardly the Vest Fjord. Some of the granite peaks rise to a height of 3,500 feet above the sea and give very imposing views.

² “The *Mare Tenebrarum*, an ocean well described by the Nubian geographer, Ptolemy Hephæstion.” (Poe’s *Eureka*, Works, ix. 7.) This must have been the great Claudius Ptolemy, the astronomer and geographer of the second century A. D., but he was probably not a Nubian, and Hephæstion is not given as one of his names. The phrase *mare tenebrarum* means “sea of darkness,” and appears sometimes as *mare tenebrosum*, the reference being to the unexplored Atlantic Ocean.

gloom was but the more forcibly illustrated by the surf which reared high up against it its white and ghastly crest, howling and shrieking forever. Just opposite the promontory upon whose apex we were placed, and at a distance of some five or six miles out at sea, there was visible a small, bleak-looking island; or, more properly, its position was discernible through the wilderness of surge in which it was enveloped. About two miles nearer the land arose another, of smaller size, hideously craggy and barren, and encompassed at various intervals by a cluster of dark rocks.

The appearance of the ocean, in the space between the more distant island and the shore, had something very unusual about it. Although, at the time, so strong a gale was blowing landward that a brig in the remote offing lay to under a double-reefed trysail, and constantly plunged her whole hull out of sight, still there was here nothing like a regular swell, but only a short, quick, angry cross dashing of water in every direction, — as well in the teeth of the wind as otherwise. Of foam there was little except in the immediate vicinity of the rocks.

“The island in the distance,” resumed the old man, “is called by the Norwegians Vurrgh. The one midway is Moskoe. That a mile to the northward is Ambaaren. Yonder are Iflesen, Hoeyholm, Keildholm, Suarven, and Buckholm. Farther off — between Moskoe and Vurrgh — are Otterholm, Flimen, Sandflesen, and Skarholm. These are the true names of the places; but why it has been thought necessary to name them at all is more than either you or I can understand. Do you hear anything? Do you see any change in the water?”

We had now been about ten minutes upon the top of Helseggen, to which we had ascended from the interior of Lofoden, so that we had caught no glimpse of the sea until it had burst upon us from the summit. As the old man spoke, I became aware of a loud and gradually increasing sound, like the moaning of a vast herd of buffaloes upon an American prairie; and at the same moment I perceived that what seamen term the *chopping* character of the ocean beneath us was rapidly changing into a current which set to the eastward. Even while I gazed, this current acquired a monstrous velocity. Each moment added to its speed, — to its headlong impetuosity. In five minutes the whole sea, as far as Vurrgh, was lashed into ungovernable fury; but it was between Moskoe and the coast that the main uproar held its sway.

Here the vast bed of the waters, seamed and scarred into a thousand conflicting channels, burst suddenly into frenzied convulsion, — heaving, boiling, hissing, — gyrating in gigantic and innumerable vortices, and all whirling and plunging on to the eastward with a rapidity which water never elsewhere assumes, except in precipitous descents.

In a few minutes more, there came over the scene another radical alteration. The general surface grew somewhat more smooth, and the whirlpools, one by one, disappeared, while prodigious streaks of foam became apparent where none had been seen before. These streaks at length, spreading out to a great distance and entering into combination, took unto themselves the gyratory motion of the subsided vortices, and seemed to form the germ of another more vast. Suddenly — very suddenly — this assumed a distinct

and definite existence, in a circle of more than a mile in diameter. The edge of the whirl was represented by a broad belt of gleaming spray; but no particle of this slipped into the mouth of the terrific funnel, whose interior, as far as the eye could fathom it, was a smooth, shining, and jet-black wall of water, inclined to the horizon at an angle of some forty-five degrees, speeding dizzily round and round with a swaying and sweltering motion, and sending forth to the winds an appalling voice, half shriek, half roar, such as not even the mighty cataract of Niagara ever lifts up in its agony to Heaven.

The mountain trembled to its very base, and the rock rocked. I threw myself upon my face, and clung to the scant herbage in an excess of nervous agitation.

"This," said I at length to the old man,—"this *can* be nothing else than the great whirlpool of the Maelström."¹

"So it is sometimes termed," said he. "We Norwegians call it the Moskoe-ström, from the island of Moskoe in the midway."²

The ordinary accounts of this vortex had by no means prepared me for what I saw. That of Jonas Ramus,³ which is perhaps the most circumstantial of

¹ Literally "grind-stream." The reports of travelers and natives about the destructive power of the whirlpool are now known to have been much exaggerated.

² More correctly *Moskenström*. The tidal current runs between Moskenaes and Mosken, two of the southernmost of the Lofoden Islands, with a velocity of seven miles an hour, and rotates around Mosken once in twelve hours.

³ Professor Woodberry gives a curious note on this passage, which may be abridged as follows: The *Encyclopædia Britannica* in its third edition took without acknowledgment a passage from a translation of *The Natural History of Norway* by Pontoppidan,

any, cannot impart the faintest conception either of the magnificence or of the horror of the scene, — or of the wild, bewildering sense of *the novel*, which confounds the beholder. I am not sure from what point of view the writer in question surveyed it, nor at what time; but it could neither have been from the summit of Helseggen, nor during a storm. There are some passages of his description, nevertheless, which may be quoted for their details, although their effect is exceedingly feeble in conveying an impression of the spectacle.

“Between Lofoden and Moskoe,” he says, “the depth of the water is between thirty-six and forty fathoms; but on the other side, toward Ver (Vurrg), this depth decreases so as not to afford a convenient passage for a vessel without the risk of splitting on the rocks, which happens even in the calmest weather. When it is flood, the stream runs up the country between Lofoden and Moskoe with a boisterous rapidity; but the roar of its impetuous ebb to the sea is scarce equaled by the loudest and most dreadful cataracts, the noise being heard several leagues off; and the vortices or pits are of such an extent and depth that, if a ship comes within its attraction, it is inevitably absorbed and carried down to the bottom, and there beat to pieces against the rocks; and when the water relaxes, the fragments thereof are

which passage had been legitimately borrowed from the older writer, Ramus. Poe used the Encyclopædia article, giving part credit to it and part to Ramus. Now in the ninth edition of the Encyclopædia the writer of the article “Whirlpool,” “after having given Poe credit for erudition taken solely from a previous edition of this very encyclopædia, which in its turn had stolen the learning from another, quotes the parts that Poe invented out of his own head.”

thrown up again. But these intervals of tranquillity are only at the turn of the ebb and flood, and in calm weather, and last but a quarter of an hour, its violence gradually returning. When the stream is most boisterous, and its fury heightened by a storm, it is dangerous to come within a Norway mile¹ of it. Boats, yachts, and ships have been carried away by not guarding against it before they were within its reach. It likewise happens frequently that whales come too near the stream, and are overpowered by its violence; and then it is impossible to describe their howlings and bellowings in their fruitless struggles to disengage themselves. A bear once, attempting to swim from Lofoden to Moskoe, was caught by the stream and borne down, while he roared terribly, so as to be heard on shore. Large stocks of firs and pine-trees, after being absorbed by the current, rise again broken and torn to such a degree as if bristles grew upon them. This plainly shows the bottom to consist of craggy rocks, among which they are whirled to and fro. This stream is regulated by the flux and reflux of the sea, it being constantly high and low water every six hours. In the year 1645, early in the morning of Sexagesima Sunday, it raged with such noise and impetuosity that the very stones of the houses on the coast fell to the ground."

In regard to the depth of the water, I could not see how this could have been ascertained at all in the immediate vicinity of the vortex. The "forty fathoms" must have reference only to portions of the channel close upon the shore either of Moskoe or Lofoden. The depth in the centre of the Moskoe-ström must

¹ The Norway mile is between four and five times as long as the English.

be immeasurably greater; and no better proof of this fact is necessary than can be obtained from even the sidelong glance into the abyss of the whirl which may be had from the highest crag of Helseggen. Looking down from this pinnacle upon the howling Phlegæton¹ below, I could not help smiling at the simplicity with which the honest Jonas Ramus records, as a matter difficult of belief, the anecdotes of the whales and the bears; for it appeared to me, in fact, a self-evident thing that the largest ships of the line² in existence, coming within the influence of that deadly attraction, could resist it as little as a feather the hurricane, and must disappear bodily and at once.

The attempts to account for the phenomenon — some of which, I remember, seemed to me sufficiently plausible in perusal — now wore a very different and unsatisfactory aspect. . The idea generally received is that this, as well as three smaller vortices among the Feroe islands,³ “have no other cause than the collision of waves rising and falling, at flux and reflux, against a ridge of rocks and shelves, which confines the water so that it precipitates itself like a cataract; and thus the higher the flood rises, the deeper must the fall be, and the natural result of all is a whirlpool or vortex, the prodigious suction of which is sufficiently known by lesser experiments.” These are the words of the “*Encyclopædia Britannica*.” Kircher and others imagine that in the centre of the channel of the Maelström is an abyss penetrating the globe,

¹ A river of Hades in which fire flowed instead of water.

² That is, men-of-war large enough to take places in a line of battle.

³ The Farøe islands are a group in the North Sea, between the Shetlands and Iceland. They belong to Denmark.

and issuing in some very remote part, — the Gulf of Bothnia being somewhat decidedly named in one instance. This opinion, idle in itself, was the one to which, as I gazed, my imagination most readily assented; and, mentioning it to the guide, I was rather surprised to hear him say that although it was the view almost universally entertained of the subject by the Norwegians, it nevertheless was not his own. As to the former notion, he confessed his inability to comprehend it; and here I agreed with him — for, however conclusive on paper, it becomes altogether unintelligible, and even absurd, amid the thunder of the abyss.¹

“You have had a good look at the whirl now,” said the old man, “and if you will creep round this crag, so as to get in its lee, and deaden the roar of the water, I will tell you a story that will convince you I ought to know something of the Moskoe-ström.”

I placed myself as desired, and he proceeded.

“Myself and my two brothers once owned a schooner-rigged smack of about seventy tons burden, with which we were in the habit of fishing among the islands beyond Moskoe, nearly to Vurrgh. In all violent eddies at sea there is good fishing, at proper opportunities, if one has only the courage to attempt it; but among the whole of the Lofoden coastmen we three were the only ones who made a regular business of going out to the islands, as I tell you. The usual grounds are a great way lower down to the southward.

¹ See, with regard to this whole matter, the article “Whirlpool” in the *Encyclopædia Britannica*, where the theory of Athanasius Kircher (1602–80) is quoted, as well as that of Ramus, who, in the same century, endeavored to show that the Maelström was Charybdis, and that Ulysses must have wandered among the northern seas.

There fish can be got at all hours, without much risk, and therefore these places are preferred. The choice spots over here among the rocks, however, not only yield the finest variety, but in far greater abundance; so that we often got in a single day what the more timid of the craft could not scrape together in a week. In fact, we made it a matter of desperate speculation — the risk of life standing instead of labor, and courage answering for capital.

“ We kept the smack in a cove about five miles higher up the coast than this; and it was our practice in fine weather to take advantage of the fifteen minutes’ slack to push across the main channel of the Moskoe-ström, far above the pool, and then drop down upon anchorage somewhere near Otterholm or Sandflesen, where the eddies are not so violent as elsewhere. Here we used to remain until nearly time for slack water again, when we weighed and made for home. We never set out upon this expedition without a steady side wind for going and coming, — one that we felt sure would not fail us before our return, — and we seldom made a miscalculation upon this point. Twice during six years we were forced to stay all night at anchor on account of a dead calm, which is a rare thing indeed just about here; and once we had to remain on the grounds nearly a week, starving to death, owing to a gale which blew up shortly after our arrival, and made the channel too boisterous to be thought of. Upon this occasion we should have been driven out to sea in spite of everything (for the whirlpools threw us round and round so violently, that at length we fouled our anchor and dragged it) if it had not been that we drifted into one of the innumerable cross-currents — here to-day and gone to-morrow

— which drove us under the lee of Flimen, where, by good luck, we brought up.

“I could not tell you the twentieth part of the difficulties we encountered ‘on the ground,’ — it is a bad spot to be in, even in good weather, — but we made shift always to run the gauntlet of the Moskoe-ström itself without accident, although at times my heart has been in my mouth when we happened to be a minute or so behind or before the slack. The wind sometimes was not as strong as we thought it at starting, and then we made rather less way than we could wish, while the current rendered the smack unmanageable. My eldest brother had a son eighteen years old, and I had two stout boys of my own. These would have been of great assistance at such times in using the sweeps,¹ as well as afterward in fishing; but, somehow, although we ran the risk ourselves, we had not the heart to let the young ones get into the danger, for, after all said and done, it *was* a horrible danger, and that is the truth.

“It is now within a few days of three years since what I am going to tell you occurred. It was on the tenth of July, 18—, a day which the people of this part of the world will never forget, for it was one in which blew the most terrible hurricane that

¹ Large oars used to assist the rudder or to propel the boat. No further explanation will be given of the numerous nautical terms employed, as the student who is interested in them may easily hunt them out for himself. An investigation of Poe’s knowledge of seamanship, which was remarkable, in spite of some errors and some obvious and tedious borrowings from manuals, will be best pursued in connection with the very uneven *Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym*. It is rather interesting to compare Pym’s first adventure with the descriptions given in the present tale.

ever came out of the heavens. And yet all the morning, and indeed until late in the afternoon, there was a gentle and steady breeze from the southwest, while the sun shone brightly, so that the oldest seaman among us could not have foreseen what was to follow.

“The three of us — my two brothers and myself — had crossed over to the islands about two o’clock, P. M., and soon nearly loaded the smack with fine fish, which, we all remarked, were more plenty ¹ that day than we had ever known them. It was just seven *by my watch* when we weighed and started for home, so as to make the worst of the Ström at slack water, which we knew would be at eight.

“We set out with a fresh wind on our starboard quarter, and for some time spanked along at a great rate, never dreaming of danger, for indeed we saw not the slightest reason to apprehend it. All at once we were taken aback by a breeze from over Helseggen. This was most unusual, — something that had never happened to us before, — and I began to feel a little uneasy, without exactly knowing why. We put the boat on the wind, but could make no headway at all for the eddies, and I was upon the point of proposing to return to the anchorage, when, looking astern, we saw the whole horizon covered with a singular copper-colored cloud that rose with the most amazing velocity.

“In the mean time the breeze that had headed us off fell away, and we were dead becalmed, drifting about in every direction. This state of things, however, did not last long enough to give us time to think about it. In less than a minute the storm was upon us; in less than two the sky was entirely overcast; and what

¹ That is, *plentiful*, — a use now chiefly colloquial. Note the similar use of “cleverly” below.

with this and the driving spray, it became suddenly so dark that we could not see each other in the smack.

“Such a hurricane as then blew it is folly to attempt describing. The oldest seaman in Norway never experienced anything like it. We had let our sails go by the run before it cleverly took us; but, at the first puff, both our masts went by the board as if they had been sawed off, — the mainmast taking with it my youngest brother, who had lashed himself to it for safety.

“Our boat was the lightest feather of a thing that ever sat upon water. It had a complete flush deck, with only a small hatch near the bow, and this hatch it had always been our custom to batten down when about to cross the Ström, by way of precaution against the chopping seas. But for this circumstance we should have foundered at once, for we lay entirely buried for some moments. How my elder brother escaped destruction I cannot say, for I never had an opportunity of ascertaining. For my part, as soon as I had let the foresail run, I threw myself flat on deck, with my feet against the narrow gunwale of the bow, and with my hands grasping a ring-bolt near the foot of the foremast. It was mere instinct that prompted me to do this, — which was undoubtedly the very best thing I could have done, — for I was too much flurried to think.

“For some moments we were completely deluged, as I say, and all this time I held my breath and clung to the bolt. When I could stand it no longer I raised myself upon my knees, still keeping hold with my hands, and thus got my head clear. Presently our little boat gave herself a shake, just as a dog does in coming out of the water, and thus rid herself, in some

measure, of the seas. I was now trying to get the better of the stupor that had come over me, and to collect my senses so as to see what was to be done, when I felt somebody grasp my arm. It was my elder brother, and my heart leaped for joy, for I had made sure that he was overboard ; but the next moment all this joy was turned into horror, for he put his mouth close to my ear and screamed out the word ‘ *Moskoe-ström !* ’

“ No one ever will know what my feelings were at that moment. I shook from head to foot, as if I had had the most violent fit of the ague. I knew what he meant by that one word well enough, — I knew what he wished to make me understand. With the wind that now drove us on, we were bound for the whirl of the Ström, and nothing could save us !

“ You perceive that, in crossing the Ström *channel*, we always went a long way up above the whirl, even in the calmest weather, and then had to wait and watch carefully for the slack ; but now we were driving right upon the pool itself, and in such a hurricane as this ! ‘ To be sure,’ I thought, ‘ we shall get there just about the slack, — there is some little hope in that,’ — but in the next moment I cursed myself for being so great a fool as to dream of hope at all. I knew very well that we were doomed, had we been ten times a ninety-gun ship.

“ By this time the first fury of the tempest had spent itself, or perhaps we did not feel it so much as we scudded before it ; but at all events the seas, which at first had been kept down by the wind and lay flat and frothing, now got up into absolute mountains. A singular change, too, had come over the heavens. Around in every direction it was still as black as

pitch, but nearly overhead there burst out, all at once, a circular rift of clear sky, — as clear as I ever saw, and of a deep, bright blue, — and through it there blazed forth the full moon with a lustre that I never before knew her to wear. She lit up everything about us with the greatest distinctness — but, oh God, what a scene it was to light up!

“I now made one or two attempts to speak to my brother, but, in some manner in which I could not understand, the din had so increased that I could not make him hear a single word, although I screamed at the top of my voice in his ear. Presently he shook his head, looking as pale as death, and held up one of his fingers, as if to say *listen!*

“At first I could not make out what he meant, but soon a hideous thought flashed upon me. I dragged my watch from its fob. It was not going. I glanced at its face by the moonlight, and then burst into tears as I flung it far away into the ocean. *It had run down at seven o'clock! We were behind the time of the slack, and the whirl of the Ström was in full fury!*

“When a boat is well built, properly trimmed, and not deep-laden, the waves in a strong gale, when she is going large, seem always to slip from beneath her, — which appears very strange to a landsman, — and this is what is called *riding*, in sea phrase.

“Well, so far we had ridden the swells very cleverly; but presently a gigantic sea happened to take us right under the counter, and bore us with it as it rose — up — up — as if into the sky. I would not have believed that any wave could rise so high. And then down we came with a sweep, a slide, and a plunge that made me feel sick and dizzy, as if I was falling

from some lofty mountain-top in a dream. But while we were up I had thrown a quick glance around,— and that one glance was all-sufficient. I saw our exact position in an instant. The Moskoe-ström whirlpool was about a quarter of a mile dead ahead, but no more like the every-day Moskoe-ström than the whirl as you now see it is like a mill-race. If I had not known where we were, and what we had to expect, I should not have recognized the place at all. As it was, I involuntarily closed my eyes in horror. The lids clenched themselves together as if in a spasm.

“It could not have been more than two minutes afterward until we suddenly felt the waves subside, and were enveloped in foam. The boat made a sharp half turn to larboard, and then shot off in its new direction like a thunderbolt. At the same moment the roaring noise of the water was completely drowned in a kind of shrill shriek,— such a sound as you might imagine given out by the water-pipes of many thousand steam-vessels letting off their steam all together. We were now in the belt of surf which always surrounds the whirl; and I thought, of course, that another moment would plunge us into the abyss, down which we could only see indistinctly on account of the amazing velocity with which we were borne along. The boat did not seem to sink into the water at all, but to skim like an air-bubble upon the surface of the surge. Her starboard side was next the whirl, and on the larboard arose the world of ocean we had left. It stood like a huge writhing wall between us and the horizon.

“It may appear strange, but now, when we were in the very jaws of the gulf, I felt more composed than

when we were only approaching it. Having made up my mind to hope no more, I got rid of a great deal of that terror which unmanned me at first. I suppose it was despair that strung my nerves.

“It may look like boasting, but what I tell you is truth, — I began to reflect how magnificent a thing it was to die in such a manner, and how foolish it was in me to think of so paltry a consideration as my own individual life, in view of so wonderful a manifestation of God’s power. I do believe that I blushed with shame when this idea crossed my mind. After a little while I became possessed with the keenest curiosity about the whirl itself. I positively felt a *wish* to explore its depths, even at the sacrifice I was going to make; and my principal grief was that I should never be able to tell my old companions on shore about the mysteries I should see. These, no doubt, were singular fancies to occupy a man’s mind in such extremity, and I have often thought since that the revolutions of the boat around the pool might have rendered me a little light-headed.

“There was another circumstance which tended to restore my self-possession; and this was the cessation of the wind, which could not reach us in our present situation; for, as you saw yourself, the belt of surf is considerably lower than the general bed of the ocean, and this latter now towered above us, a high, black, mountainous ridge. If you have never been at sea in a heavy gale, you can form no idea of the confusion of mind occasioned by the wind and spray together. They blind, deafen, and strangle you, and take away all power of action or reflection. But we were now, in a great measure, rid of these annoyances, just as death-condemned felons in prison are allowed

petty indulgences forbidden them while their doom is yet uncertain.

“How often we made the circuit of the belt it is impossible to say. We careered round and round for perhaps an hour, flying rather than floating, getting gradually more and more into the middle of the surge, and then nearer and nearer to its horrible inner edge. All this time I had never let go of the ring-bolt. My brother was at the stern, holding on to a small empty water-cask which had been securely lashed under the coop of the counter, and was the only thing on deck that had not been swept overboard when the gale first took us. As we approached the brink of the pit he let go his hold upon this and made for the ring, from which, in the agony of his terror, he endeavored to force my hands, as it was not large enough to afford us both a secure grasp. I never felt deeper grief than when I saw him attempt this act, although I knew he was a madman when he did it, — a raving maniac through sheer fright. I did not care, however, to contest the point with him. I knew it could make no difference whether either of us held on at all, so I let him have the bolt, and went astern to the cask. This there was no great difficulty in doing, for the smack flew round steadily enough, and upon an even keel, — only swaying to and fro with the immense sweeps and swelters of the whirl. Scarcely had I secured myself in my new position when we gave a wild lurch to starboard, and rushed headlong into the abyss. I muttered a hurried prayer to God, and thought all was over.

“As I felt the sickening sweep of the descent, I had instinctively tightened my hold upon the barrel and closed my eyes. For some seconds I dared not

open them, — while I expected instant destruction, and I wondered that I was not already in my death-struggles with the water. But moment after moment elapsed. I still lived. The sense of falling had ceased; and the motion of the vessel seemed much as it had been before, while in the belt of foam, with the exception that she now lay more along. I took courage and looked once again upon the scene.

“Never shall I forget the sensations of awe, horror, and admiration with which I gazed about me. The boat appeared to be hanging, as if by magic, midway down, upon the interior surface of a funnel vast in circumference, prodigious in depth, and whose perfectly smooth sides might have been mistaken for ebony, but for the bewildering rapidity with which they spun around, and for the gleaming and ghastly radiance they shot forth, as the rays of the full moon, from that circular rift amid the clouds, which I have already described, streamed in a flood of golden glory along the black walls, and far away down into the inmost recesses of the abyss.

“At first I was too much confused to observe anything accurately. The general burst of terrific grandeur was all that I beheld. When I recovered myself a little, however, my gaze fell instinctively downward. In this direction I was able to obtain an unobstructed view, from the manner in which the smack hung on the inclined surface of the pool. She was quite upon an even keel, — that is to say, her deck lay in a plane parallel with that of the water; but this latter sloped at an angle of more than forty-five degrees, so that we seemed to be lying upon our beam ends. I could not help observing, nevertheless, that I had scarcely more difficulty in maintaining my hold

and footing in this situation than if we had been upon a dead level; and this, I suppose, was owing to the speed at which we revolved.

“The rays of the moon seemed to search the very bottom of the profound gulf; but still I could make out nothing distinctly, on account of a thick mist in which everything there was enveloped, and over which there hung a magnificent rainbow,¹ like that narrow and tottering bridge which Mussulmans say is the only pathway between Time and Eternity.² This mist or spray was no doubt occasioned by the clashing of the great walls of the funnel as they all met together at the bottom; but the yell that went up to the heavens from out of that mist I dare not attempt to describe.

“Our first slide into the abyss itself, from the belt of foam above, had carried us to a great distance down the slope; but our farther descent was by no means proportionate. Round and round we swept, — not with any uniform movement, but in dizzying swings and jerks that sent us sometimes only a few hundred yards, sometimes nearly the complete circuit of the whirl. Our progress downward, at each revolution, was slow but very perceptible.

¹ “The moon sometimes forms a bow or arch of light, more faint than that formed by the sun, and called a *lunar rainbow*.” *Century Dictionary*.

² This is the bridge al Sirât, laid over the midst of hell, “finer than a hair, and sharper than the edge of a sword.” This bridge must be passed over by believers and unbelievers alike, and to make the journey still more difficult Mohammed added briars and hooked thorns to either side of the narrow structure. See Sale’s *Preliminary Discourse* to his translation of the Koran, section iv. Query: Would a Norwegian fisherman make such a comparison?

“Looking about me upon the wide waste of liquid ebony on which we were thus borne, I perceived that our boat was not the only object in the embrace of the whirl. Both above and below us were visible fragments of vessels, large masses of building timber and trunks of trees, with many smaller articles, such as pieces of house furniture, broken boxes, barrels, and staves. I have already described the unnatural curiosity which had taken the place of my original terrors. It appeared to grow upon me as I drew nearer and nearer to my dreadful doom. I now began to watch with a strange interest the numerous things that floated in our company. I *must* have been delirious; for I even sought *amusement* in speculating upon the relative velocities of their several descents toward the foam below. ‘This fir-tree,’ I found myself at one time saying, ‘will certainly be the next thing that takes the awful plunge and disappears;’ and then I was disappointed to find that the wreck of a Dutch merchant ship overtook it and went down before. At length, after making several guesses of this nature, and being deceived in all, this fact—the fact of my invariable miscalculation—set me upon a train of reflection that made my limbs again tremble, and my heart beat heavily once more.

“It was not a new terror that thus affected me, but the dawn of a more exciting *hope*. This hope arose partly from memory, and partly from present observation. I called to mind the great variety of buoyant matter that strewed the coast of Lofoden, having been absorbed and then thrown forth by the Moskoe-ström. By far the greater number of the articles were shattered in the most extraordinary way,—so chafed and

roughened as to have the appearance of being stuck full of splinters, — but then I distinctly recollected that there were *some* of them which were not disfigured at all. Now I could not account for this difference except by supposing that the roughened fragments were the only ones which had been *completely absorbed*, — that the others had entered the whirl at so late a period of the tide, or from some reason had descended so slowly after entering, that they did not reach the bottom before the turn of the flood came, or of the ebb, as the case might be. I conceived it possible, in either instance, that they might be thus whirled up again to the level of the ocean, without undergoing the fate of those which had been drawn in more early or absorbed more rapidly. I made, also, three important observations. The first was, that, as a general rule, the larger the bodies were, the more rapid their descent; the second, that, between two masses of equal extent, the one spherical and the other *of any other shape*, the superiority in speed of descent was with the sphere; the third, that, between two masses of equal size, the one cylindrical and the other of any other shape, the cylinder was absorbed the more slowly. Since my escape, I have had several conversations on this subject with an old schoolmaster of the district; and it was from him that I learned the use of the words ‘cylinder’ and ‘sphere.’¹ He explained to me — although I have forgotten the explanation — how what I observed was, in fact, the natural consequence of the forms of the floating fragments, and showed me how it happened

¹ Here Poe remembers that he is not talking himself, and gives a plausible explanation of the learning displayed by his fisherman.

that a cylinder swimming in a vortex offered more resistance to its suction, and was drawn in with greater difficulty, than an equally bulky body of any form whatever.¹

“There was one startling circumstance which went a great way in enforcing these observations, and rendering me anxious to turn them to account, and this was that, at every revolution, we passed something like a barrel, or else the yard or the mast of a vessel; while many of these things, which had been on our level when I first opened my eyes upon the wonders of the whirlpool, were now high up above us, and seemed to have moved but little from their original station.

“I no longer hesitated what to do. I resolved to lash myself securely to the water-cask upon which I now held, to cut it loose from the counter, and to throw myself with it into the water. I attracted my brother’s attention by signs, pointed to the floating barrels that came near us, and did everything in my power to make him understand what I was about to do. I thought at length that he comprehended my design; but, whether this was the case or not, he shook his head despairingly, and refused to move from his station by the ring-bolt. It was impossible to reach him; the emergency admitted of no delay; and so, with a bitter struggle, I resigned him to his fate, fastened myself to the cask by means of the

¹ See Archimedes, *De iis Quæ in Humido Vehuntur*, lib. ii. [The famous Syracusan mathematician (287–212 B. C.) is now represented by nine extant treatises. The one of which Poe gives the Latin title is in two books, and discusses the “principles of floating, and the positions of equilibrium of floating parabolic conoids.”]

lashings which secured it to the counter, and precipitated myself with it into the sea, without another moment's hesitation.

“The result was precisely what I had hoped it might be. As it is myself who now tell you this tale, — as you see that I *did* escape, and as you are already in possession of the mode in which this escape was effected, and must therefore anticipate all that I have farther to say, — I will bring my story quickly to conclusion. It might have been an hour, or thereabout, after my quitting the smack, when, having descended to a vast distance beneath me, it made three or four wild gyrations in rapid succession, and, bearing my loved brother with it, plunged headlong, at once and forever, into the chaos of foam below. The barrel to which I was attached sunk very little farther than half the distance between the bottom of the gulf and the spot at which I leaped overboard, before a great change took place in the character of the whirlpool. The slope of the sides of the vast funnel became momentarily less and less steep. The gyrations of the whirl grew gradually less and less violent. By degrees, the froth and the rainbow disappeared, and the bottom of the gulf seemed slowly to uprise. The sky was clear, the winds had gone down, and the full moon was setting radiantly in the west, when I found myself on the surface of the ocean, in full view of the shores of Lofoden, and above the spot where the pool of the Moskoe-ström *had been*. It was the hour of the slack, but the sea still heaved in mountainous waves from the effects of the hurricane. I was borne violently into the channel of the Ström, and in a few minutes was hurried down the coast into the ‘grounds’ of the fishermen. A boat picked me up — exhausted

from fatigue — and (now that the danger was removed) speechless from the memory of its horror. Those who drew me on board were my old mates and daily companions, but they knew me no more than they would have known a traveler from the spirit-land. My hair, which had been raven-black the day before, was as white as you see it now. They say, too, that the whole expression of my countenance had changed. I told them my story; they did not believe it. I now tell it to you, and I can scarcely expect you to put more faith in it than did the merry fishermen of Lofoden.”¹

THE MASQUE OF THE RED DEATH.²

THE “Red Death” had long devastated the country. No pestilence had ever been so fatal or so hideous. Blood was its Avatar³ and its seal,—the red-

¹ Notice the fact that the old man might have omitted all reference to the disbelief of the fishermen. He does not, and his guilelessness adds to his sincerity and trustworthiness, and thus increases the effect of illusion upon the reader, or else gives the latter an excuse for incredulity. In either case the ending given the story is most artistic.

² “The Masque of the Red Death” appeared in *Graham’s Magazine* for May, 1842. It is remarkable for its admirable evolution, for the weird impressiveness of its climax, and for the general effectiveness of its style. It is also noticeable as an elaborate study in colors, in which particular it may be compared with the description of the chamber in *Ligeia*. As elsewhere, Poe revels in the bizarre, but not even in the *House of Usher* has he succeeded so finely in passing from the merely peculiar and *outré* to the terrible as in this tale.

³ That is, blood was its manifestation in human terms. The word is borrowed from Hindoo mythology.

ness and the horror of blood. There were sharp pains, and sudden dizziness, and then profuse bleeding at the pores, with dissolution. The scarlet stains upon the body, and especially upon the face, of the victim were the pest ban which shut him out from the aid and from the sympathy of his fellow-men. And the whole seizure, progress, and termination of the disease were the incidents of half an hour.¹

But the Prince Prospero² was happy and dauntless and sagacious. When his dominions were half depopulated, he summoned to his presence a thousand hale and light-hearted friends from among the knights and dames of his court, and with these retired to the deep seclusion of one of his castellated abbeys. This was an extensive and magnificent structure, the creation of the prince's own eccentric yet august taste.³ A strong and lofty wall girdled it in. This wall had gates of iron. The courtiers, having entered, brought furnaces and massy hammers and welded the bolts. They resolved to leave means neither of ingress nor egress to the sudden impulses of despair or of frenzy from within. The abbey was amply provisioned. With such precautions the courtiers might bid defiance to contagion. The external world could take care of itself. In the mean time it was folly to grieve or to think. The prince had provided all the appliances of pleasure. There were buffoons, there were improvisa-

¹ See standard historians for descriptions of the plague in Athens during the Peloponnesian war, and of the Black Death in the fourteenth century.

² The name is perhaps borrowed from Shakespeare's *Tempest*.

³ Poe may have had in mind the extravagancies of Beckford, the author of *Vathek*, at Fonthill.

tori,¹ there were ballet dancers, there were musicians, there was beauty, there was wine. All these and security were within. Without was the "Red Death."

It was toward the close of the fifth or sixth month of his seclusion, and while the pestilence raged most furiously abroad, that the Prince Prospero entertained his thousand friends at a masked ball of the most unusual magnificence.

It was a voluptuous scene, that masquerade. But first let me tell of the rooms in which it was held. There were seven, — an imperial suite. In many palaces, however, such suites form a long and straight vista, while the folding doors slide back nearly to the walls on either hand, so that the view of the whole extent is scarcely impeded. Here the case was very different, as might have been expected from the prince's love of the bizarre. The apartments were so irregularly disposed that the vision embraced but little more than one at a time. There was a sharp turn at every twenty or thirty yards, and at each turn a novel effect. To the right and left, in the middle of each wall, a tall and narrow Gothic window looked out upon a closed corridor which pursued the windings of the suite. These windows were of stained glass, whose color varied in accordance with the prevailing hue of the decorations of the chamber into which it opened. That at the eastern extremity was

¹ That is, persons who composed poetry or music extemporaneously. Italy has long been the home of such spontaneous poets, and the reference to them here makes one sure that the scene of the tale was laid in that country. The student will remember that the withdrawal of gay Florentines from the plague gave rise to a very different series of tales, — to the immortal *Decameron* of Boccaccio.

hung, for example, in blue, and vividly blue were its windows. The second chamber was purple in its ornaments and tapestries, and here the panes were purple. The third was green throughout, and so were the casements. The fourth was furnished and lighted with orange, the fifth with white, the sixth with violet. The seventh apartment was closely shrouded in black velvet tapestries that hung all over the ceiling and down the walls, falling in heavy folds upon a carpet of the same material and hue. But, in this chamber only, the color of the windows failed to correspond with the decorations. The panes here were scarlet,—a deep blood-color. Now in no one of the seven apartments was there any lamp or candelabrum amid the profusion of golden ornaments that lay scattered to and fro or depended from the roof. There was no light of any kind emanating from lamp or candle within the suite of chambers. But in the corridors that followed the suite there stood, opposite to each window, a heavy tripod, bearing a brazier of fire, that projected its rays through the tinted glass and so glaringly illumined the room. And thus were produced a multitude of gaudy and fantastic appearances. But in the western or black chamber the effect of the fire-light that streamed upon the dark hangings through the blood-tinted panes was ghastly in the extreme, and produced so wild a look upon the countenances of those who entered that there were few of the company bold enough to set foot within its precincts at all.

It was in this apartment, also, that there stood against the western wall a gigantic clock of ebony. Its pendulum swung to and fro with a dull, heavy, monotonous clang; and, when the minute-hand made

the circuit of the face, and the hour was to be stricken,¹ there came from the brazen lungs of the clock a sound which was clear and loud and deep and exceedingly musical, but of so peculiar a note and emphasis that, at each lapse of an hour, the musicians of the orchestra were constrained to pause, momentarily, in their performance, to hearken to the sound; and thus the waltzers perforce ceased their evolutions; and there was a brief disconcert of the whole gay company; and, while the chimes of the clock yet rang, it was observed that the giddiest grew pale, and the more aged and sedate passed their hands over their brows as if in confused reverie or meditation. But when the echoes had fully ceased, a light laughter at once pervaded the assembly; the musicians looked at each other and smiled as if at their own nervousness and folly, and made whispering vows, each to the other, that the next chiming of the clock should produce in them no similar emotion; and then, after the lapse of sixty minutes (which embrace three thousand and six hundred seconds of the Time that flies),² there came yet another chiming of the clock, and then were the same disconcert and tremulousness and meditation as before.

But, in spite of these things, it was a gay and magnificent revel. The tastes of the prince were peculiar. He had a fine eye for colors and effects. He disregarded the *decora*³ of mere fashion. His plans were

¹ Not now a usual form of the participle, but familiar in such expressions as "to be stricken in years."

² Note the effect of the unexpected statement of this very obvious and indisputable fact.

³ This is in form the plural of the Latin *decus*, — grace, ornament; or of *decōrum*, — propriety, that which is fitting. The

bold and fiery, and his conceptions glowed with barbaric lustre. There are some who would have thought him mad. His followers felt that he was not. It was necessary to hear and see and touch him to be *sure* that he was not.

He had directed, in great part, the movable embellishments of the seven chambers, upon occasion of this great *fête*; and it was his own guiding taste which had given character to the masqueraders. Be sure they were grotesque. There were much glare and glitter and piquancy and phantasm — much of what has been since seen in *Hernani*.¹ There were arabesque figures² with unsuited limbs and appointments. There were delirious fancies such as the madman fashions. There was much of the beautiful, much of the wanton, much of the bizarre, something of the terrible, and not a little of that which might have excited disgust. To and fro in the seven chambers there stalked, in fact, a multitude of dreams. And these — the dreams — writhed in and about, taking hue from the rooms, and causing the wild music of the orchestra to seem as the echo of their steps. And, anon, there strikes the ebony clock which stands in the hall of the velvet. And then, for a moment, all is still, and all is silent save the voice

pronunciation of the two plurals differs, however, that of the first being *dec'ōra*; that of the second being *decō'ra*. It is fairly probable that Poe intended to use the latter form.

¹ The well-known drama of Victor Hugo (1830).

² That is, of a capricious, fanciful character, — including geometrical forms, fruits, flowers, etc., — a species of ornamentation in which the Arabians were eminently successful. Poe was inordinately fond of this word, actually using it to designate an important portion of his tales (*Tales of the Arabesque and Grotesque*).

of the clock. The dreams are stiff-frozen as they stand. But the echoes of the chime die away, — they have endured but an instant, — and a light, half-subdued laughter floats after them as they depart. And now again the music swells, and the dreams live, and writhe to and fro more merrily than ever, taking hue from the many tinted windows through which stream the rays from the tripods. But to the chamber which lies most westwardly of the seven there are now none of the maskers who venture: for the night is waning away, and there flows a ruddier light through the blood-colored panes; and the blackness of the sable drapery appalls; and, to him whose foot falls upon the sable carpet, there comes from the near clock of ebony a muffled peal more solemnly emphatic than any which reaches *their* ears who indulge in the more remote gayeties of the other apartments.

But these other apartments were densely crowded, and in them beat feverishly the heart of life. And the revel went whirlingly on, until at length there commenced the sounding of midnight upon the clock. And then the music ceased, as I have told; and the evolutions of the waltzers were quieted; and there was an uneasy cessation of all things as before. But now there were twelve strokes to be sounded by the bell of the clock; and thus it happened, perhaps, that more of thought crept, with more of time, into the meditations of the thoughtful among those who reveled. And thus too it happened, perhaps, that before the last echoes of the last chime had utterly sunk into silence, there were many individuals in the crowd who had found leisure to become aware of the presence of a masked figure which had arrested the attention of no single individual before. And the

rumor of this new presence having spread itself whisperingly around, there arose at length from the whole company a buzz, or murmur, expressive of disapprobation and surprise, — then, finally, of terror, of horror, and of disgust.

In an assembly of phantasms such as I have painted, it may well be supposed that no ordinary appearance could have excited such sensation. In truth the masquerade license of the night was nearly unlimited; but the figure in question had out-Heroded Herod,¹ and gone beyond the bounds of even the prince's indefinite decorum. There are chords in the hearts of the most reckless which cannot be touched without emotion. Even with the utterly lost, to whom life and death are equally jests, there are matters of which no jests can be made. The whole company, indeed, seemed now deeply to feel that in the costume and bearing of the stranger neither wit nor propriety existed. The figure was tall and gaunt, and shrouded from head to foot in the habiliments of the grave. The mask which concealed the visage was made so nearly to resemble the countenance of a stiffened corpse that the closest scrutiny must have had difficulty in detecting the cheat. And yet all this might have been endured, if not approved, by the mad revellers around. But the mummer had gone so far as to assume the type of the Red Death. His vesture was dabbled in *blood*; and his broad brow, with all the features of the face, was besprinkled with the scarlet horror.

When the eyes of Prince Prospero fell upon this spectral image (which with a slow and solemn move-

¹ Poe seems to be fond of this rather infelicitous commonplace.

ment, as if more fully to sustain its rôle, stalked to and fro among the waltzers) he was seen to be convulsed, in the first moment, with a strong shudder either of terror or distaste; but, in the next, his brow reddened with rage.

“Who dares?” he demanded hoarsely of the courtiers who stood near him, — “who dares insult us with this blasphemous mockery? Seize him and unmask him that we may know whom we have to hang at sunrise from the battlements!”

It was in the eastern or blue chamber in which stood the Prince Prospero as he uttered these words. They rang throughout the seven rooms loudly and clearly; for the prince was a bold and robust man, and the music had become hushed at the waving of his hand.

It was in the blue room where stood the prince, with a group of pale courtiers by his side. At first, as he spoke, there was a slight rushing movement of this group in the direction of the intruder, who at the moment was also near at hand, and now, with deliberate and stately step, made closer approach to the speaker. But, from a certain nameless awe with which the mad assumption of the mummer had inspired the whole party, there were found none who put forth hand to seize him, so that, unimpeded, he passed within a yard of the prince's person; and, while the vast assembly, as if with one impulse, shrank from the centres of the rooms to the walls, he made his way uninterruptedly, but with the same solemn and measured step which had distinguished him from the first, through the blue chamber to the purple — through the purple to the green — through the green to the orange — through this again to the white — and even thence to the violet, ere a decided movement had been

made to arrest him. It was then, however, that the Prince Prospero, maddening with rage and the shame of his own momentary cowardice, rushed hurriedly through the six chambers, while none followed him on account of a deadly terror that had seized upon all. He bore aloft a drawn dagger, and had approached, in rapid impetuosity, to within three or four feet of the retreating figure, when the latter, having attained the extremity of the velvet apartment, turned suddenly and confronted his pursuer. There was a sharp cry — and the dagger dropped gleaming upon the sable carpet, upon which, instantly afterwards, fell prostrate in death the Prince Prospero. Then, summoning the wild courage of despair, a throng of the revelers at once threw themselves into the black apartment, and, seizing the mummer, whose tall figure stood erect and motionless within the shadow of the ebony clock, gasped in unutterable horror at finding the grave cerements and corpse-like mask, which they handled with so violent a rudeness, untenanted by any tangible form.

And now was acknowledged the presence of the Red Death. He had come like a thief in the night. And one by one dropped the revelers in the blood-bedewed halls of their revel, and died each in the despairing posture of his fall. And the life of the ebony clock went out with that of the last of the gay. And the flames of the tripods expired. And Darkness and Decay and the Red Death held illimitable dominion over all.

THE FALL OF THE HOUSE OF USHER¹

Son cœur est un luth suspendu ;
 Sitôt qu'on le touche il résonne.

*Béranger.*²

DURING the whole of a dull, dark, and soundless day in the autumn of the year, when the clouds hung oppressively low in the heavens, I had been passing alone, on horseback,³ through a singularly dreary tract of country ; and at length found myself, as the shades of the evening drew on, within view of the melancholy House of Usher. I know not how it was, but, with the first glimpse of the building, a sense of insufferable gloom pervaded my spirit. I say insufferable ;

¹ *The Fall of the House of Usher* was first published in Burton's *Gentleman's Magazine* for September, 1839, i. e., just one year after the appearance of the weird tale usually coupled with it, — *Ligeia*. The latter story seems to have been Poe's favorite, but the public has on the whole preferred the *House of Usher*. Both represent Poe's morbid but etherealized supernaturalism at its height; yet, while *Ligeia* is perhaps stronger in direct personal appeal, and is thus a more characteristic product of its author's intense poetic subjectivity, *Usher* is probably superior in artistic evolution, and in the perfect concord of its haunting harmonies of sound and color. Poe would have made a name for himself in literature had he written merely *The Purloined Letter* and the *Descent into the Maelström* ; when, however, we consider that he is likewise the author of *Usher*, *Ligeia*, *The Masque of the Red Death*, and *Shadow*, we must concede that, even without his poetry, he would have won for himself not merely a position in literature, but a place high and apart and practically inaccessible.

² "His heart is a suspended lute; as soon as it is touched it resounds." J. P. de Béranger (1780–1857) was a very popular French lyric poet of democratic proclivities.

³ It is amusing to find Poe giving his fine tale the *cachet* of G. P. R. James, whose habit of opening his stories with a solitary horseman has been much ridiculed.

for the feeling was unrelieved by any of that half-pleasurable, because poetic, sentiment with which the mind usually receives even the sternest natural images of the desolate or terrible. I looked upon the scene before me — upon the mere house, and the simple landscape features of the domain, upon the bleak walls, upon the vacant eye-like windows, upon a few rank sedges, and upon a few white trunks of decayed trees — with an utter depression of soul which I can compare to no earthly sensation more properly than to the after-dream of the reveler upon opium: the bitter lapse into every-day life, the hideous dropping off of the veil. There was an iciness, a sinking, a sickening of the heart, an unredeemed dreariness of thought, which no goading of the imagination could torture into aught of the sublime. What was it — I paused to think — what was it that so unnerved me in the contemplation of the House of Usher? It was a mystery all insoluble; nor could I grapple with the shadowy fancies that crowded upon me as I pondered. I was forced to fall back upon the unsatisfactory conclusion that while, beyond doubt, there *are* combinations of very simple natural objects which have the power of thus affecting us, still the analysis of this power lies among considerations beyond our depth. It was possible, I reflected, that a mere different arrangement of the particulars of the scene, of the details of the picture, would be sufficient to modify, or perhaps to annihilate, its capacity for sorrowful impression,¹ and, acting upon this idea, I reined my horse to the precipitous brink of a black and lurid tarn² that lay

¹ Poe means "for producing sorrowful impressions." The word may be used, however, in an active sense.

² A small mountain lake, generally one that has no visible feeders. Poe is fond of this poetic word.

in unruffled lustre by the dwelling, and gazed down — but with a shudder even more thrilling than before — upon the remodeled and inverted images of the gray sedge, and the ghastly tree-stems, and the vacant and eye-like windows.

Nevertheless, in this mansion of gloom I now proposed to myself a sojourn of some weeks. Its proprietor, Roderick Usher, had been one of my boon companions in boyhood ; but many years had elapsed since our last meeting. A letter, however, had lately reached me in a distant part of the country — a letter from him — which in its wildly importunate nature had admitted of no other than a personal reply. The MS. gave evidence of nervous agitation. The writer spoke of acute bodily illness, of a mental disorder which oppressed him, and of an earnest desire to see me, as his best and indeed his only personal friend, with a view of attempting, by the cheerfulness of my society, some alleviation of his malady. It was the manner in which all this, and much more, was said — it was the apparent *heart* that went with his request — which allowed me no room for hesitation ; and I accordingly obeyed forthwith what I still considered a very singular summons.

Although as boys we had been even intimate associates, yet I really knew little of my friend. His reserve had been always excessive and habitual. I was aware, however, that his very ancient family had been noted, time out of mind, for a peculiar sensibility of temperament, displaying itself, through long ages, in many works of exalted art, and manifested of late in repeated deeds of munificent yet unobtrusive charity, as well as in a passionate devotion to the intricacies, perhaps even more than to the orthodox

and easily recognizable beauties, of musical science. I had learned, too, the very remarkable fact that the stem of the Usher race, all time-honored as it was, had put forth at no period any enduring branch ; in other words, that the entire family lay in the direct line of descent, and had always, with a very trifling and very temporary variation, so lain.¹ It was this deficiency, I considered, while running over in thought the perfect keeping of the character of the premises with the accredited character of the people, and while speculating upon the possible influence which the one, in the long lapse of centuries, might have exercised upon the other, — it was this deficiency, perhaps, of collateral issue, and the consequent undeviating transmission from sire to son of the patrimony with the name, which had at length so identified the two as to merge the original title of the estate in the quaint and equivocal appellation of the “House of Usher,” — an appellation which seemed to include, in the minds of the peasantry who used it, both the family and the family mansion.

I have said that the sole effect of my somewhat childish experiment, that of looking down within the tarn, had been to deepen the first singular impression. There can be no doubt that the consciousness of the rapid increase of my superstition — for why should I not so term it? — served mainly to accelerate the increase itself. Such, I have long known, is the paradoxical² law of all sentiments having terror as a basis. And it might have been for this reason only, that,

¹ Notice the emphatic periodicity of this sentence, as well as the loose use of “people” in the sentence that follows.

² That is, apparently absurd, yet on investigation proved to be true.

when I again uplifted my eyes to the house itself from its image in the pool, there grew in my mind a strange fancy, — a fancy so ridiculous, indeed, that I but mention it to show the vivid force of the sensations which oppressed me. I had so worked upon my imagination as really to believe that about the whole mansion and domain there hung an atmosphere peculiar to themselves and their immediate vicinity: an atmosphere which had no affinity with the air of heaven, but which had reeked up from the decayed trees, and the gray wall, and the silent tarn; a pestilent and mystic vapor, dull, sluggish, faintly discernible, and leaden-hued.

Shaking off from my spirit what *must* have been a dream, I scanned more narrowly the real aspect of the building. Its principal feature seemed to be that of an excessive antiquity. The discoloration of ages had been great. Minute fungi overspread the whole exterior, hanging in a fine tangled web-work from the eaves. Yet all this was apart from any extraordinary dilapidation. No portion of the masonry had fallen; and there appeared to be a wild inconsistency between its still perfect adaptation of parts and the crumbling condition of the individual stones. In this there was much that reminded me of the specious totality of old wood-work which has rotted for long years in some neglected vault, with no disturbance from the breath of the external air. Beyond this indication of extensive decay, however, the fabric gave little token of instability. Perhaps the eye of a scrutinizing observer might have discovered a barely perceptible fissure, which, extending from the roof of the building in front, made its way down the wall in a zigzag direction, until it became lost in the sullen waters of the tarn.

Noticing these things, I rode over a short causeway to the house. A servant in waiting took my horse, and I entered the Gothic archway of the hall. A valet, of stealthy step, thence conducted me in silence through many dark and intricate passages in my progress to the studio of his master. Much that I encountered on the way contributed, I know not how, to heighten the vague sentiments of which I have already spoken. While the objects around me — while the carvings of the ceiling, the sombre tapestries of the walls, the ebon blackness of the floors, and the phantasmagoric¹ armorial trophies which rattled as I strode, were but matters to which, or to such as which, I had been accustomed from my infancy, — while I hesitated not to acknowledge how familiar was all this, I still wondered to find how unfamiliar were the fancies which ordinary images were stirring up. On one of the staircases I met the physician of the family. His countenance, I thought, wore a mingled expression of low cunning and perplexity. He accosted me with trepidation and passed on. The valet now threw open a door and ushered me into the presence of his master.

The room in which I found myself was very large and lofty. The windows were long, narrow, and pointed, and at so vast a distance from the black oaken floor as to be altogether inaccessible from within. Feeble gleams of encrimsoned light made their way through the trellised panes, and served to render sufficiently distinct the more prominent objects around; the eye, however, struggled in vain to reach the remoter angles of the chamber, or the recesses of the vaulted and fretted ceiling. Dark draperies hung

¹ This is one of Poe's favorite words.

upon the walls. The general furniture was profuse, comfortless, antique, and tattered. Many books and musical instruments lay scattered about, but failed to give any vitality to the scene. I felt that I breathed an atmosphere of sorrow. An air of stern, deep, and irredeemable gloom hung over and pervaded all.¹

Upon my entrance, Usher arose from a sofa on which he had been lying at full length, and greeted me with a vivacious warmth which had much in it, I at first thought, of an overdone cordiality, — of the constrained effort of the *ennuyé* man of the world. A glance, however, at his countenance, convinced me of his perfect sincerity. We sat down; and for some moments, while he spoke not, I gazed upon him with a feeling half of pity, half of awe. Surely man had never before so terribly altered, in so brief a period, as had Roderick Usher! It was with difficulty that I could bring myself to admit the identity of the wan being before me with the companion of my early boyhood. Yet the character of his face had been at all times remarkable. A cadaverousness of complexion; an eye large, liquid, and luminous beyond comparison; lips somewhat thin and very pallid, but of a surpassingly beautiful curve; a nose of a delicate Hebrew model,² but with a breadth of nostril unusual in similar formations; a finely-moulded chin, speaking, in its want of prominence, of a want of moral energy;

¹ Poe does not here indulge himself, as in *Ligeia* and the *Red Death*, in describing a bizarre luxury which he had certainly had little opportunity of enjoying in a concrete fashion. He has been working up to a description of Usher, and to that, like a true artist, he devotes his powers.

² “I looked at the delicate outlines of the nose, and nowhere but in the graceful medallions of the Hebrews had I beheld a similar perfection.” *Ligeia*.

hair of a more than web-like softness and tenuity, — these features, with an inordinate expansion above the regions of the temple, made up altogether a countenance not easily to be forgotten. And now in the mere exaggeration of the prevailing character of these features, and of the expression they were wont to convey, lay so much of change that I doubted to whom I spoke. The now ghastly pallor of the skin, and the now miraculous lustre of the eye, above all things startled and even awed me. The silken hair, too, had been suffered to grow all unheeded, and as, in its wild gossamer texture, it floated rather than fell about the face, I could not, even with effort, connect its arabesque ¹ expression with any idea of simple humanity.

In the manner of my friend I was at once struck with an incoherence, an inconsistency; and I soon found this to arise from a series of feeble and futile struggles to overcome an habitual trepidancy, an excessive nervous agitation. For something of this nature I had indeed been prepared, no less by his letter than by reminiscences of certain boyish traits, and by conclusions deduced from his peculiar physical conformation and temperament. His action was alternately vivacious and sullen. His voice varied rapidly from a tremulous indecision (when the animal spirits seemed utterly in abeyance) to that species of energetic concision — that abrupt, weighty, unhurried, and hollow-sounding enunciation, that leaden, self-balanced, and perfectly modulated guttural utterance — which may be observed in the lost drunkard, or the irreclaimable eater of opium, during the periods of his most intense excitement.

It was thus that he spoke of the object of my visit,

¹ See page 57, note 2.

of his earnest desire to see me, and of the solace he expected me to afford him. He entered at some length into what he conceived to be the nature of his malady. It was, he said, a constitutional and a family evil, and one for which he despaired to find a remedy, — a mere nervous affection, he immediately added, which would undoubtedly soon pass off. It displayed itself in a host of unnatural sensations. Some of these, as he detailed them, interested and bewildered me; although, perhaps, the terms and the general manner of the narration had their weight. He suffered much from a morbid acuteness of the senses; the most insipid food was alone endurable; he could wear only garments of certain texture; the odors of all flowers were oppressive; his eyes were tortured by even a faint light; and there were but peculiar sounds, and these from stringed instruments, which did not inspire him with horror.

To an anomalous species of terror I found him a bounden¹ slave. "I shall perish," said he, "I *must* perish in this deplorable folly. Thus, thus, and not otherwise, shall I be lost. I dread the events of the future, not in themselves, but in their results. I shudder at the thought of any, even the most trivial, incident, which may operate upon this intolerable agitation of soul. I have, indeed, no abhorrence of danger, except in its absolute effect, — in terror. In this unnerved, in this pitiable condition, I feel that the period will sooner or later arrive when I must abandon life and reason together in some struggle with the grim phantasm, FEAR."

I learned moreover at intervals, and through

¹ This form is now archaic, save in the familiar phrase "bounden duty." Poe uses the same expression in *Ligeia*.

broken and equivocal hints, another singular feature of his mental condition. He was enchained by certain superstitious impressions in regard to the dwelling which he tenanted, and whence for many years he had never ventured forth, in regard to an influence whose supposititious force was conveyed in terms too shadowy here to be restated, — an influence which some peculiarities in the mere form and substance of his family mansion had, by dint of long sufferance, he said, obtained over his spirit; an effect which the physique of the gray walls and turrets, and of the dim tarn into which they all looked down, had at length brought about upon the morale of his existence.

He admitted, however, although with hesitation, that much of the peculiar gloom which thus afflicted him could be traced to a more natural and far more palpable origin, — to the severe and long-continued illness, indeed to the evidently approaching dissolution, of a tenderly beloved sister, his sole companion for long years, his last and only relative on earth. “Her decease,” he said, with a bitterness which I can never forget, “would leave him (him, the hopeless and the frail) the last of the ancient race of the Ushers.” While he spoke, the lady Madeline¹ (for so was she called) passed slowly through a remote portion of the apartment, and, without having noticed my presence, disappeared. I regarded her with an utter astonishment not unmingled with dread, and yet I found it

¹ The student will find it interesting to make a comparative examination of Poe’s shadowy, high-born heroines with their superlative, uncommon characteristics of mind and body, and their melodious, unfamiliar names, — of his Madelines, and Li-geias, and Berenices, and Eleonoras, and Morellas, and Lenores. All seem to have sprung from a single prototype.

impossible to account for such feelings. A sensation of stupor oppressed me, as my eyes followed her retreating steps. When a door, at length, closed upon her, my glance sought instinctively and eagerly the countenance of the brother; but he had buried his face in his hands, and I could only¹ perceive that a far more than ordinary wanness had overspread the emaciated fingers through which trickled many passionate tears.

The disease of the lady Madeline had long baffled the skill of her physicians. A settled apathy, a gradual wasting away of the person, and frequent although transient affections of a partially cataleptical character, were the unusual diagnosis. Hitherto she had steadily borne up against the pressure of her malady, and had not betaken herself finally to bed; but, on the closing-in of the evening of my arrival at the house, she succumbed (as her brother told me at night with inexpressible agitation) to the prostrating power of the destroyer; and I learned that the glimpse I had obtained of her person would thus probably be the last I should obtain, — that the lady, at least while living, would be seen by me no more.

For several days ensuing, her name was unmentioned by either Usher or myself; and during this period I was busied in earnest endeavors to alleviate the melancholy of my friend. We painted and read together; or I listened, as if in a dream, to the wild improvisations² of his speaking guitar. And thus, as a closer and still closer intimacy admitted me more unreservedly into the recesses of his spirit, the more bitterly did I perceive the futility of all attempt at cheering a mind from which darkness, as if an inherent

¹ Is this adverb properly placed? ² See page 54, note 1.

positive quality, poured forth upon all objects of the moral and physical universe, in one unceasing radiation of gloom.

I shall ever bear about me a memory of the many solemn hours I thus spent alone with the master of the House of Usher. Yet I should fail in any attempt to convey an idea of the exact character of the studies, or of the occupations, in which he involved me, or led me the way. An excited and highly distempered ideality threw a sulphureous lustre over all. His long, improvised dirges will ring forever in my ears. Among other things, I hold painfully in mind a certain singular perversion and amplification of the wild air of the last waltz of Von Weber.¹ From the paintings over which his elaborate fancy brooded, and which grew, touch by touch, into vaguenesses at which I shuddered the more thrillingly because I shuddered knowing not why, — from these paintings (vivid as their images now are before me) I would in vain endeavor to educe more than a small portion which should lie within the compass of merely written words. By the utter simplicity, by the nakedness of his designs, he arrested and overawed attention. If ever mortal painted an idea, that mortal was Roderick Usher. For me at least, in the circumstances then surrounding me, there arose, out of the pure abstractions which the hypochondriac contrived to throw upon his canvas, an intensity of intolerable awe, no shadow of which felt I ever yet in the contemplation of the certainly glowing yet too concrete reveries of Fuseli.²

¹ Karl Maria, Baron von Weber (1786-1826), the celebrated German composer.

² Henry Fuseli (1741-1825) born in Zurich as Heinrich

One of the phantasmagoric conceptions of my friend, partaking not so rigidly of the spirit of abstraction, may be shadowed forth, although feebly, in words. A small picture presented the interior of an immensely long and rectangular vault or tunnel, with low walls, smooth, white, and without interruption or device. Certain accessory points of the design served well to convey the idea that this excavation lay at an exceeding depth below the surface of the earth. No outlet was observed in any portion of its vast extent, and no torch, or other artificial source of light, was discernible ; yet a flood of intense rays rolled throughout, and bathed the whole in a ghastly and inappropriate splendor.

I have just spoken of that morbid condition of the auditory nerve which rendered all music intolerable to the sufferer, with the exception of certain effects of stringed instruments. It was, perhaps, the narrow limits to which he thus confined himself upon the guitar, which gave birth, in great measure, to the fantastic character of his performances. But the fervid *facility* of his impromptus could not be so accounted for. They must have been, and were, in the notes as well as in the words of his wild fantasias (for he not unfrequently accompanied himself with rhymed verbal improvisations), the result of that intense mental collectedness and concentration to which I have previously alluded as observable only in particular moments of the highest artificial excitement. The words of one of these rhapsodies I have easily remembered. I was, perhaps, the more forcibly impressed with it as he gave it, because, in the under or Fuessly, — an artist of great power, and professor of painting at the Royal Academy in London.

mystic current of its meaning, I fancied that I perceived, and for the first time, a full consciousness, on the part of Usher, of the tottering of his lofty reason upon her throne. The verses, which were entitled "The Haunted Palace,"¹ ran very nearly, if not accurately, thus:—

I.

In the greenest of our valleys
 By good angels tenanted,
 Once a fair and stately palace —
 Radiant palace — reared its head.
 In the monarch Thought's dominion,
 It stood there ;
 Never seraph spread a pinion
 Over fabric half so fair.

II.

Banners yellow, glorious, golden,
 On its roof did float and flow
 (This — all this — was in the olden
 Time long ago),
 And every gentle air that dallied,
 In that sweet day,
 Along the ramparts plumed and pallid,
 A wingèd odor went away.

III.

Wanderers in that happy valley
 Through two luminous windows saw
 Spirits moving musically
 To a lute's well-tuned law,

¹ These verses were first published in the *Baltimore Museum* for April, 1839. They rank among the best of Poe's poems, and fit their prose setting so well that, as Mr. Stedman has remarked, it might almost seem that the tale was written to set off the poem. Some critics have seen in the verses a symbolical description of the ravages wrought by drink in the poet's own character.

Round about a throne, where sitting,
 Porphyrogene,¹
 In state his glory well befitting,
 The ruler of the realm was seen.

IV.

And all with pearl and ruby glowing
 Was the fair palace door,
 Through which came flowing, flowing, flowing,
 And sparkling evermore,
 A troop of Echoes, whose sweet duty
 Was but to sing,
 In voices of surpassing beauty,
 The wit and wisdom of their king.²

V.

But evil things, in robes of sorrow,
 Assailed the monarch's high estate;
 (Ah, let us mourn, for never morrow
 Shall dawn upon him, desolate !)
 And, round about his home, the glory
 That blushed and bloomed
 Is but a dim-remembered story
 Of the old time entombed.

VI.

And travellers now within that valley
 Through the red-litten³ windows see
 Vast forms that move fantastically
 To a discordant melody;
 While, like a ghastly rapid river,
 Through the pale door,
 A hideous throng rush out forever,
 And laugh — but smile no more.

¹ That is, born in the purple, — of royal birth.

² “ When (like committed linnets) I
 With shriller throat shall sing
 The sweetness, mercy, majesty
 And glories of my King.”

LOVELACE, *To Althea from Prison.*

³ Note the archaic, and so poetic, form of the participle.

I well remember that suggestions arising from this ballad led us into a train of thought, wherein there became manifest an opinion of Usher's which I mention, not so much on account of its novelty (for other men¹ have thought thus) as on account of the pertinacity with which he maintained it. This opinion, in its general form, was that of the sentience of all vegetable things. But in his disordered fancy, the idea had assumed a more daring character, and trespassed, under certain conditions, upon the kingdom of inorganization.² I lack words to express the full extent or the earnest *abandon* of his persuasion. The belief, however, was connected (as I have previously hinted) with the gray stones of the home of his forefathers. The conditions of the sentience had been here, he imagined, fulfilled in the method of collocation of these stones,—in the order of their arrangement, as well as in that of the many fungi which overspread them, and of the decayed trees which stood around; above all, in the long undisturbed endurance of this arrangement, and in its reduplication in the still waters of the tarn. Its evidence—the evidence of the sentience—was to be seen, he said (and I here

¹ Watson, Dr. Percival, Spallanzani, and especially the Bishop of Llandaff.—See *Chemical Essays*, vol. v. [Of the authors mentioned by Poe, Richard Watson (1737–1816) was the celebrated Bishop of Llandaff, the liberal statesman, the opponent of Tom Paine, who early in life was made professor of chemistry at Cambridge, although he knew nothing of the subject, and succeeded in writing very popularly about the science: Dr. James Gates Percival (1795–1856) was an American poet and scientist of great versatility; and Lazaro Spallanzani (1729–1799) was a noted traveler, collector, teacher, and writer of many scientific subjects.]

² That is, the mineral kingdom.

started as he spoke), in the gradual yet certain condensation of an atmosphere of their own about the waters and the walls. The result was discoverable, he added, in that silent yet importunate and terrible influence which for centuries had moulded the destinies of his family, and which made *him* what I now saw him, — what he was. Such opinions need no comment, and I will make none.

Our books — the books which for years had formed no small portion of the mental existence of the invalid — were, as might be supposed, in strict keeping with this character of phantasm. We pored together over such works as the *Ververt* and *Chartreuse* of Gresset; the *Belphegor* of Machiavelli; the *Heaven and Hell* of Swedenborg; the *Subterranean Voyage* of Nicholas Klimm by Holberg; the *Chiromancy* of Robert Flud, of Jean D'Indaginé, and of *De la Chambre*; the *Journey into the Blue Distance* of Tieck; and the *City of the Sun* of Campanella. One favorite volume was a small octavo edition of the *Directorium Inquisitorum*, by the Dominican Eymeric de Gironne; and there were passages in Pomponius Mela, about the old African Satyrs and Ægipans, over which Usher would sit dreaming for hours. His chief delight, however, was found in the perusal of an exceedingly rare and curious book in quarto Gothic, — the manual of a forgotten church, — the *Vigiliæ Mortuorum secundum Chorum Ecclesiæ Maguntinæ*.¹

¹ Of the books mentioned by Poe, some at least of which he probably never saw, as they are inappropriate to his purposes, a brief account will be sufficient. *Ver-vert* and *Ma Chartreuse* are two poems by Jean Baptiste Gresset (1709-77), the former of which gives an amusing account of the adventures of a profane parrot in a convent of nuns, which brought upon the author the censure of the church. The *Belfagor* of the celebrated states-

I could not help thinking of the wild ritual of this work, and of its probable influence on the hypochondriac, when one evening, having informed me abruptly that the lady Madeline was no more, he stated his intention of preserving her corpse for a fortnight,

man and writer Niccolo Machiavelli (1469-1527) is a satire concerning marriage, the Devil being forced to admit that hell is preferable to his wife's society. The *Heaven and Hell* of Emanuel Swedenborg (1688-1772), the great Swedish mystic and founder of the sect that bears his name, consists of extracts from his more important work, the *Arcana Cœlestia*. The *Nicolai Klimmi Iter Subterraneum* was a widely celebrated poem by the great poet and scholar, Ludwig Holberg (born at Bergen in Norway, 1684, died at Copenhagen, 1754), who is preëminent among the earlier Scandinavian writers for his genius and his erudition. *Chiromancy* means divination by means of the hand (palmistry applied to the future); and Poe refers to works on physiognomy (hardly, it would seem, to specific books on chiromancy) by the English mystic, Robert Fludd (1574-1637), and by two continental writers of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries respectively. The work of Ludwig Tieck (1773-1853), the great German romanticist to which Poe refers, may be found in his *Works* (1852-54) vol. viii. The *Civitas Solis* is a celebrated sketch of an ideal state (cf. Plato's *Republic* and More's *Utopia*) by the great Italian philosopher, Tomaso Campanella (1568-1639), whom the Inquisition persecuted with horrible severity. The work cited, with inverted title, with regard to this terrible institution, is a minute account of its methods by N. Eymerich, inquisitor-general for Castile in 1356. Pomponius Mela was a Spaniard who wrote a famous work on geography (*De Situ Orbis*) in the first century A. D. (*Ægipan*, by the way, is really nothing but an epithet applied to Pan because he guarded goats.) The *Vigiliæ Mortuorum* has not been discovered by Professor Woodberry under the title Poe gives at length, but books of a similar character exist which probably supplied Poe with a hint for his own title. The expression "quarto Gothic" means that the book was a quarto (*i. e.* one in which the leaf is a fourth part of a sheet), and printed in an early form of black-faced and pointed letters. (The epithet "Gothic" can hardly have its liturgic use here.)

(previously to its final interment) in one of the numerous vaults within the main walls of the building. The worldly reason, however, assigned for this singular proceeding was one which I did not feel at liberty to dispute. The brother had been led to his resolution (so he told me) by consideration of the unusual character of the malady of the deceased, of certain obtrusive and eager inquiries on the part of her medical men, and of the remote and exposed situation of the burial-ground of the family. I will not deny that when I called to mind the sinister countenance of the person whom I met upon the staircase, on the day of my arrival at the house, I had no desire to oppose what I regarded as at best but a harmless, and by no means an unnatural, precaution.

At the request of Usher, I personally aided him in the arrangements for the temporary entombment. The body having been encoffined, we two alone bore it to its rest. The vault in which we placed it (and which had been so long unopened that our torches, half smothered in its oppressive atmosphere, gave us little opportunity for investigation) was small, damp, and entirely without means of admission for light; lying, at great depth, immediately beneath that portion of the building in which was my own sleeping apartment. It had been used apparently, in remote feudal times, for the worst purposes of a donjon-keep, and in later days as a place of deposit for powder, or some other highly combustible substance, as a portion of its floor, and the whole interior of a long archway through which we reached it, were carefully sheathed with copper. The door, of massive iron, had been also similarly protected. Its immense weight caused an unusually sharp grating sound as it moved upon its hinges.

Having deposited our mournful burden upon tressels within this region of horror, we partially turned aside the yet unscrewed lid of the coffin, and looked upon the face of the tenant. A striking similitude between the brother and sister now first arrested my attention; and Usher, divining, perhaps, my thoughts, murmured out some few words from which I learned that the deceased and himself had been twins, and that sympathies of a scarcely intelligible nature had always existed between them. Our glances, however, rested not long upon the dead, for we could not regard her unawed. The disease which had thus entombed the lady in the maturity of youth, had left, as usual in all maladies of a strictly cataleptical character, the mockery of a faint blush upon the bosom and the face, and that suspiciously lingering smile upon the lip which is so terrible in death. We replaced and screwed down the lid, and having secured the door of iron, made our way, with toil, into the scarcely less gloomy apartments of the upper portion of the house.

And now, some days of bitter grief having elapsed, an observable change came over the features of the mental disorder of my friend. His ordinary manner had vanished. His ordinary occupations were neglected or forgotten. He roamed from chamber to chamber with hurried, unequal, and objectless step. The pallor of his countenance had assumed, if possible, a more ghastly hue, but the luminousness of his eye had utterly gone out. The once occasional huskiness of his tone was heard no more; and a tremulous quaver, as if of extreme terror, habitually characterized his utterance. There were times, indeed, when I thought his unceasingly agitated mind was laboring with some oppressive secret, to divulge

which he struggled for the necessary courage. At times, again, I was obliged to resolve all into the mere inexplicable vagaries of madness, for I beheld him gazing upon vacancy for long hours, in an attitude of the profoundest attention, as if listening to some imaginary sound. It was no wonder that his condition terrified — that it infected me. I felt creeping upon me, by slow yet certain degrees, the wild influences of his own fantastic yet impressive superstitions.

It was, especially, upon retiring to bed late in the night of the seventh or eighth day after the placing of the lady Madeline within the donjon,¹ that I experienced the full power of such feelings. Sleep came not near my couch, while the hours waned and waned away. I struggled to reason off the nervousness which had dominion over me. I endeavored to believe that much if not all of what I felt was due to the bewildering influence of the gloomy furniture of the room, — of the dark and tattered draperies which, tortured into motion by the breath of a rising tempest, swayed fitfully to and fro upon the walls, and rustled uneasily about the decorations of the bed. But my efforts were fruitless. An irrepressible tremor gradually pervaded my frame; and at length there sat upon my very heart an incubus of utterly causeless alarm. Shaking this off with a gasp and a struggle, I uplifted myself upon the pillows, and, peering earnestly within the intense darkness of the chamber, hearkened — I know not why, except that an instinctive spirit prompted me — to certain low and indefinite sounds which came, through the pauses of the storm, at long intervals, I knew not whence. Overpowered

The inner stronghold of a castle. The word is a variant of "dungeon." See page 80, line 27.

by an intense sentiment of horror, unaccountable yet unendurable, I threw on my clothes with haste (for I felt that I should sleep no more during the night), and endeavored to arouse myself from the pitiable condition into which I had fallen, by pacing rapidly to and fro through the apartment.

I had taken but few turns in this manner, when a light step on an adjoining staircase arrested my attention. I presently recognized it as that of Usher. In an instant afterward he rapped with a gentle touch at my door, and entered, bearing a lamp. His countenance was, as usual, cadaverously wan — but, moreover, there was a species of mad hilarity in his eyes, — an evidently restrained hysteria in his whole demeanor. His air appalled me — but anything was preferable to the solitude which I had so long endured, and I even welcomed his presence as a relief.

“And you have not seen it?” he said abruptly, after having stared about him for some moments in silence, — “you have not then seen it? — but, stay! you shall.” Thus speaking, and having carefully shaded his lamp, he hurried to one of the casements, and threw it freely open to the storm.

The impetuous fury of the entering gust nearly lifted us from our feet. It was, indeed, a tempestuous yet sternly beautiful night, and one wildly singular in its terror and its beauty. A whirlwind had apparently collected its force in our vicinity, for there were frequent and violent alterations in the direction of the wind; and the exceeding density of the clouds (which hung so low as to press upon the turrets of the house) did not prevent our perceiving the life-like velocity with which they flew careering from all points against each other, without passing away into the

distance. I say that even their exceeding density did not prevent our perceiving this; yet we had no glimpse of the moon or stars, nor was there any flashing forth of the lightning. But the under surfaces of the huge masses of agitated vapor, as well as all terrestrial objects immediately around us, were glowing in the unnatural light of a faintly luminous and distinctly visible gaseous exhalation which hung about and enshrouded the mansion.

"You must not — you shall not behold this!" said I shudderingly, to Usher, as I led him with a gentle violence from the window to a seat. "These appearances, which bewilder you, are merely electrical phenomena not uncommon — or it may be that they have their ghastly origin in the rank miasma of the tarn. Let us close this casement; the air is chilling and dangerous to your frame. Here is one of your favorite romances. I will read, and you shall listen; — and so we will pass away this terrible night together."

The antique volume which I had taken up was the "Mad Trist" of Sir Launcelot Canning;¹ but I had called it a favorite of Usher's more in sad jest than in earnest; for, in truth, there is little in its uncouth and unimaginative prolixity which could have had interest for the lofty and spiritual ideality of my friend. It was, however, the only book immediately at hand; and I indulged a vague hope that the excitement which now agitated the hypochondriac might find relief (for the history of mental disorder is full of similar anomalies) even in the extremeness of the folly which I should read. Could I have judged, indeed, by the wild, overstrained air of vivacity with

¹ Professor Woodberry has not found this book, and it is more than likely that Poe invented both the title and the extracts.

which he hearkened, or apparently hearkened, to the words of the tale, I might well have congratulated myself upon the success of my design.

I had arrived at that well-known portion of the story where Ethelred, the hero of the *Trist*, having sought in vain for peaceable admission into the dwelling of the hermit, proceeds to make good an entrance by force. Here, it will be remembered, the words of the narrative run thus:—

“And Ethelred, who was by nature of a doughty heart, and who was now mighty withal on account of the powerfulness of the wine which he had drunken, waited no longer to hold parley with the hermit, who, in sooth, was of an obstinate and maliceful turn, but, feeling the rain upon his shoulders, and fearing the rising of the tempest, uplifted his mace outright, and with blows made quickly room in the plankings of the door for his gauntleted hand; and now, pulling therewith sturdily, he so cracked, and ripped, and tore all asunder, that the noise of the dry and hollow-sounding wood alarumed ¹ and reverberated throughout the forest.”

At the termination of this sentence I started, and for a moment paused; for it appeared to me (although I at once concluded that my excited fancy had deceived me)—it appeared to me that from some very remote portion of the mansion there came, indistinctly, to my ears, what might have been in its exact similarity of character the echo (but a stifled and dull one certainly) of the very cracking and ripping sound which Sir Launcelot had so particularly described. It was, beyond doubt, the coincidence alone

¹ That is, alarmed. The whole tone of the passage suggests an intentional heightening of what was at best an absurd style.

which had arrested my attention; for, amid the rattling of the sashes of the casements, and the ordinary commingled noises of the still increasing storm, the sound, in itself, had nothing, surely, which should have interested or disturbed me. I continued the story: —

“But the good champion Ethelred, now entering within the door, was sore enraged and amazed to perceive no signal of the malicious hermit; but, in the stead thereof, a dragon of a scaly and prodigious demeanor, and of a fiery tongue, which sate in guard before a palace of gold with a floor of silver; and upon the wall there hung a shield of shining brass with this legend enwritten: —

Who entereth herein, a conqueror hath bin;

Who slayeth the dragon, the shield he shall win.

And Ethelred uplifted his mace, and struck upon the head of the dragon, which fell before him, and gave up his pesty breath, with a shriek so horrid and harsh, and withal so piercing, that Ethelred had fain¹ to close his ears with his hands against the dreadful noise of it, the like whereof was never before heard.”

Here again I paused abruptly, and now with a feeling of wild amazement, for there could be no doubt whatever that, in this instance, I did actually hear (although from what direction it proceeded I found it impossible to say) a low and apparently distant, but harsh, protracted, and most unusual screaming or grating sound, — the exact counterpart of what my fancy had already conjured up for the dragon's unnatural shriek as described by the romancer.

Oppressed as I certainly was, upon the occurrence of this second and most extraordinary coincidence,

¹ Generally “was fain,” *i. e.* was glad, or content.

by a thousand conflicting sensations, in which wonder and extreme terror were predominant, I still retained sufficient presence of mind to avoid exciting, by any observation, the sensitive nervousness of my companion. I was by no means certain that he had noticed the sounds in question; although, assuredly, a strange alteration had during the last few minutes taken place in his demeanor. From a position fronting my own, he had gradually brought round his chair, so as to sit with his face to the door of the chamber; and thus I could but partially perceive his features, although I saw that his lips trembled as if he were murmuring inaudibly. His head had dropped upon his breast; yet I knew that he was not asleep, from the wide and rigid opening of the eye as I caught a glance of it in profile. The motion of his body, too, was at variance with this idea, for he rocked from side to side with a gentle yet constant and uniform sway. Having rapidly taken notice of all this, I resumed the narrative of Sir Launcelot, which thus proceeded:—

“And now the champion, having escaped from the terrible fury of the dragon, bethinking himself of the brazen shield, and of the breaking up of the enchantment which was upon it, removed the carcass from out of the way before him, and approached valorously over the silver pavement of the castle to where the shield was upon the wall; which in sooth tarried not for his full coming, but fell down at his feet upon the silver floor, with a mighty great and terrible ringing sound.”

No sooner had these syllables passed my lips than—as if a shield of brass had indeed, at the moment, fallen heavily upon a floor of silver—I became aware

of a distinct, hollow, metallic, and clangorous yet apparently muffled reverberation. Completely unnerved, I leaped to my feet; but the measured rocking movement of Usher was undisturbed. I rushed to the chair in which he sat. His eyes were bent fixedly before him, and throughout his whole countenance there reigned a stony rigidity. But, as I placed my hand upon his shoulder, there came a strong shudder over his whole person; a sickly smile quivered about his lips; and I saw that he spoke in a low, hurried, and gibbering murmur, as if unconscious of my presence. Bending closely over him, I at length drank in the hideous import of his words.

“Not hear it? — yes, I hear it, and *have* heard it. Long — long — long — many minutes, many hours, many days, have I heard it, yet I dared not — oh, pity me, miserable wretch that I am! — I dared not — I *dared* not speak! *We have put her living in the tomb!*¹ Said I not that my senses were acute? I *now* tell you that I heard her first feeble movements in the hollow coffin. I heard them — many, many days ago — yet I dared not — *I dared not speak!* And now — to-night — Ethelred — ha! ha! — the breaking of the hermit’s door, and the death-cry of the dragon, and the clangor of the shield! — say, rather, the rending of her coffin, and the grating of the iron hinges of her prison, and her struggles within the coppered archway of the vault! Oh, whither shall I fly? Will she not be here anon? Is she not hurrying to upbraid me for my haste? Have I not heard

¹ Poe was morbidly interested in the subject of supposed deaths and premature burials. He introduces it, for example, in the present tale, in *Ligeia*, in *Premature Burial*, and in the *extravaganza*, *Loss of Breath*.

her footstep on the stair? Do I not distinguish that heavy and horrible beating of her heart? Madman!" — here he sprang furiously to his feet, and shrieked out his syllables, as if in the effort he were giving up his soul — "*Madman! I tell you that she now stands without the door!*"

As if in the superhuman energy of his utterance there had been found the potency of a spell, the huge antique panels to which the speaker pointed threw slowly back, upon the instant, their ponderous and ebony jaws. It was the work of the rushing gust — but then without those doors there *did* stand the lofty and enshrouded figure of the lady Madeline of Usher! There was blood upon her white robes, and the evidence of some bitter struggle upon every portion of her emaciated frame. For a moment she remained trembling and reeling to and fro upon the threshold — then, with a low moaning cry, fell heavily inward upon the person of her brother, and, in her violent and now final death agonies, bore him to the floor a corpse, and a victim to the terrors he had anticipated.

From that chamber and from that mansion I fled agnast. The storm was still abroad in all its wrath as I found myself crossing the old causeway. Suddenly there shot along the path a wild light, and I turned to see whence a gleam so unusual could have issued; for the vast house and its shadows were alone behind me. The radiance was that of the full, setting, and blood-red moon, which now shone vividly through that once barely-discernible fissure, of which I have before spoken as extending from the roof of the building, in a zigzag direction, to the base. While I gazed, this fissure rapidly widened — there came

a fierce breath of the whirlwind — the entire orb of the satellite burst at once upon my sight — my brain reeled as I saw the mighty walls rushing asunder — there was a long, tumultuous shouting sound like the voice of a thousand waters — and the deep and dank tarn at my feet closed sullenly and silently over the fragments of the “*House of Usher*.”

SHADOW — A PARABLE.¹

Yea! though I walk through the valley of the Shadow.

*Psalm of David.*²

YE who read are still among the living; but I who write shall have long since gone my way into the region of shadows. For indeed strange things shall happen, and secret things be known, and many centuries shall pass away, ere these memorials be seen of³ men. And, when seen, there will be some to disbelieve and some to doubt, and yet a few who will find

¹ *Shadow* was first published in *The Southern Literary Messenger* for September, 1835. It seems to have been written prior to October, 1833, and to have formed part of the projected *Tales of the Folio Club*. In style, as Professor Woodberry has noted, it shows the mark of Bulwer's influence, but it displays at the same time some of the most strikingly original qualities of Poe's weird imagination. It is a most beautiful harmony of thought and sound and color, to paraphrase Mr. Stedman, and takes very high rank among its author's creations, despite certain infelicities of style, and the questionable quality of the scholarship displayed. Its companion piece *Silence* should certainly be read by the student, who should be careful not to be misled by the hypercritical strictures sometimes directed against the two “prose-poems.”

² Psalm xxiii.

³ Note the poetic effect of the obsolete use of the preposition

much to ponder upon in the characters here graven with a stylus of iron.

The year had been a year of terror, and of feelings more intense than terror for which there is no name upon the earth. For many prodigies and signs had taken place, and far and wide, over sea and land, the black wings of the Pestilence were spread abroad.¹ To those, nevertheless, cunning in the stars, it was not unknown that the heavens wore an aspect of ill; and to me, the Greek Oinos,² among others, it was evident that now had arrived the alternation of that seven hundred and ninety-fourth year when, at the entrance of Aries, the planet Jupiter is conjoined with the red ring of the terrible Saturnus. The peculiar spirit of the skies, if I mistake not greatly, made itself manifest, not only in the physical orb of the earth, but in the souls, imaginations, and meditations of mankind.³

Over some flasks of the red Chian⁴ wine, within the walls of a noble hall in a dim city called Ptolemais,⁵

- See *King Pest* (written near the same time) and *The Masque of the Red Death* for Poe's descriptions of plagues.

² Oinos is simply the Greek for "wine."

³ This passage is steeped in the spirit of the old astrology. *Alternation* means "recurrence."

⁴ Chios, now Scio, one of the most important of the islands of the Ægean, was famous for its wine and marble. Cf. Matthew Arnold's *The Scholar Gypsy*: —

"Freighted with amber grapes and Chian wine."

⁵ There were five cities of this name in the ancient world. The mention of "Catacombs" farther on might incline one to believe that Poe meant Ptolemais Hermii, a city of Upper Egypt (if he meant anything); but the reference to the Elysian plains points as strongly to the most *western* of the five cities, that Ptolemais (now Tolmeta) which formed an important member of the Libyan Pentapolis. See *Harper's Classical Dictionary*.

we sat at night, a company of seven. And to our chamber there was no entrance save by a lofty door of brass; and the door was fashioned by the artisan Corinnos,¹ and, being of rare workmanship, was fastened from within. Black draperies likewise, in the gloomy room, shut out from our view the moon, the lurid stars, and the peopleless streets; but the bod- ing and the memory of Evil, — they ² would not be so excluded. There were things around us and about of which I can render no distinct account, — things material and spiritual; heaviness in the atmosphere, a sense of suffocation, anxiety, and, above all, that terrible state of existence which the nervous experi- ence when the senses are keenly living and awake, and meanwhile the powers of thought lie dormant. A dead weight hung upon us. It hung upon our limbs, upon the household furniture, upon the goblets from which we drank; and all things were depressed and borne down thereby, — all things save only the flames of the seven iron lamps which illumined our revel. Uprearing themselves in tall slender lines of light, they thus remained burning, all pallid and motionless; and in the mirror which their lustre formed upon the round table of ebony at which we sat, each of us there assembled beheld the pallor of his own countenance, and the unquiet glare in the downcast eyes of his companions. Yet we laughed and were merry in our proper ³ way, — which was hysterical, — and sang

¹ This name does not seem to have been borne in Greek history or literature by any person of importance except by a shadowy epic poet.

² Notice the poetic effect of this use of the pronoun, a device employed later in the "Parable."

³ Is this epithet used here in the sense of "appropriate," or in its obsolete sense of "own"?

the songs of Anacreon,¹ — which are madness, — and drank deeply, although the purple wine reminded us of blood. For there was yet another tenant of our chamber in the person of young Zoilus.² Dead and at full length he lay, enshrouded, the genius and the demon³ of the scene. Alas! he bore no portion in our mirth, save that his countenance, distorted with the plague, and his eyes, in which Death had but half extinguished the fire of the pestilence, seemed to take such interest in our merriment as the dead may haply take in the merriment of those who are to die. But although I, Oinos, felt that the eyes of the departed were upon me, still I forced myself not to perceive the bitterness of their expression, and, gazing down steadily into the depths of the ebony mirror, sang with a loud and sonorous voice the songs of the son of Teios.⁴ But gradually my songs they ceased, and their echoes, rolling afar off among the sable draperies of the chamber, became weak and undistinguishable, and so faded away. And, lo! from among those sable draperies where the sounds of the song departed, there came forth a dark and undefined shadow, — a shadow such as the moon, when low in heaven, might fashion

¹ The famous Greek lyric poet of wine and love, born about 550 B. C. at Teos in Asia Minor. Most of his genuine work has perished, but a number of songs in imitation of his style have been preserved, which may be read in the graceful translations of Thomas Moore.

² Zoilus is a name of unpleasant suggestion. See *Harper's Classical Dictionary*.

³ Poe possibly means that Zoilus was the *daimon* (Gr. δαίμων), i. e. ministering spirit, or genius, rather than that he was strictly the *evil* spirit of the scene. Taken in this sense, "demon" would intensify "genius."

⁴ Should be Teos (Gr. Τέως). See note 1, above. There is an adjective Τήιος which may have misled Poe.

from the figure of a man; but it was the shadow neither of man nor of God, nor of any familiar thing. And, quivering awhile among the draperies of the room, it at length rested in full view upon the surface of the door of brass. But the shadow was vague and formless and indefinite, and was the shadow neither of man nor of God — neither God of Greece, nor God of Chaldæa, nor any Egyptian God. And the shadow rested upon the brazen doorway, and under the arch of the entablature¹ of the door, and moved not, nor spoke any word, but there became stationary and remained. And the door whereupon the shadow rested was, if I remember aright, over against the feet of the young Zoilus enshrouded. But we, the seven there assembled, having seen the shadow as it came out from among the draperies, dared not steadily behold it, but cast down our eyes, and gazed continually into the depths of the mirror of ebony. And at length I, Oinos, speaking some low words, demanded of the shadow its dwelling and its appellation. And the shadow answered, “I am SHADOW, and my dwelling is near to the catacombs of Ptolemais, and hard by those dim plains of Helusion² which border upon the foul Charonian canal.”³ And then did we, the seven, start from our seats in horror, and stand trembling, and shuddering, and aghast: for the tones in the voice of the shadow were not the tones of any one

¹ See *Century Dictionary*, or some treatise on architecture. Speaking loosely, it is a part of a lintel construction.

² That is, the plains of Elysium, or Elusion (not *Helusion*; cf. Gr. Ἠλύσιον), near the western borders of the earth, where, according to Homer, fortunate heroes, without previously dying, enjoyed an immortality of happiness.

³ The river of Acheron, over which Charon ferried the souls of the dead to the infernal regions.

being, but of a multitude of beings, and, varying in their cadences from syllable to syllable, fell duskily upon our ears in the well-remembered and familiar accents of many thousand departed friends.¹

¹ There is no more finely imaginative conception in Poe's writings than this of the voice of the Shadow uniting in itself the tones of the victims of the plague.

II

THE GOLD-BUG
THE PURLOINED LETTER
AND OTHER TALES

THE GOLD-BUG.¹

What ho ! what ho ! this fellow is dancing mad !
He hath been bitten by the Tarantula.

*All in the Wrong.*²

MANY years ago I contracted an intimacy with a Mr. William Legrand. He was of an ancient Huguénot³ family, and had once been wealthy; but a

¹ *The Gold-Bug* was first published in *The Dollar Newspaper* (Philadelphia), June 21-28, 1843, where it had won a prize of one hundred dollars. It has always ranked high among Poe's tales, and illustrates admirably the analytic character of his mind. Later masters of the short story have accustomed us to demand more succinct beginnings and a more exact dialect, but perhaps none has surpassed Poe in his combined treatment of those two sources of perennial romantic interest, the cryptogram and the treasure-trove. The student will do well to read Stevenson's *Treasure Island* and Poe's own short essay on *Cryptography*, which was occasioned by his having offered to solve any cipher that might be sent him.

² *All in the Wrong* is the title of an amusing comedy by Arthur Murphy (1730-1805), a well-known English playwright and man of letters. It was produced in London in 1760 and revived in New York in 1836. Poe, it will be remembered, removed to the latter city in January, 1837; hence he may have had the play brought to his attention. The present editor is in doubt about the whole matter, however, for *All in the Wrong* is in prose and Poe's blank-verse quotation does not appear in the copy examined. Perhaps Poe had another source than Murphy's play, or perhaps he was up to his old trick of mystifying his readers. A *Tarantula* is a large spider whose sting was supposed to cause a disease called tarantism, that could be cured only by music or dancing; hence the expressions *tarantula dance* and *tarantella*. (*Century Dictionary*.)

³ After the revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685, many

series of misfortunes had reduced him to want. To avoid the mortification consequent upon his disasters, he left New Orleans, the city of his forefathers, and took up his residence at Sullivan's Island, near Charleston, South Carolina.

This island is a very singular one. It consists of little else than the sea sand, and is about three miles long. Its breadth at no point exceeds a quarter of a mile. It is separated from the mainland by a scarcely perceptible creek, oozing its way through a wilderness of reeds and slime, a favorite resort of the marsh-hen. The vegetation, as might be supposed, is scant, or at least dwarfish. No trees of any magnitude are to be seen. Near the western extremity, where Fort Moultrie¹ stands, and where are some miserable frame buildings, tenanted, during summer, by the fugitives from Charleston dust and fever,² may be found, indeed, the bristly palmetto; but the whole island, with the exception of this western point, and a line of hard, white beach on the seacoast, is covered with a dense undergrowth of the sweet myrtle, so much prized by the horticulturists of England. The shrub here often attains the height of fifteen or twenty feet, and forms an almost impenetrable coppice, burthening the air with its fragrance.

In the utmost recesses of this coppice, not far from the eastern or more remote end of the island, Legrand

French Protestants settled in the American colonies, particularly in South Carolina.

¹ The fort was erected in 1776, and while unfinished was bravely defended against the British by Colonel William Moultrie (1731-1805, — afterwards major-general), whose name was appropriately given to it. It will be remembered that Poe served for a short time in Fort Moultrie.

² This is probably unjust to Charleston.

had built himself a small hut, which he occupied when I first, by mere accident, made his acquaintance. This soon ripened into friendship, for there was much in the recluse to excite interest and esteem. I found him well educated, with unusual powers of mind, but infected with misanthropy, and subject to perverse moods of alternate enthusiasm and melancholy. He had with him many books, but rarely employed them. His chief amusements were gunning and fishing, or sauntering along the beach and through the myrtles, in quest of shells or entomological specimens, — his collection of the latter might have been envied by a Swammerdam.¹ In these excursions he was usually accompanied by an old negro, called Jupiter, who had been manumitted² before the reverses of the family, but who could be induced, neither by threats nor by promises, to abandon what he considered his right of attendance upon the footsteps of his young “Massa Will.” It is not improbable that the relatives of Legrand, conceiving him to be somewhat unsettled in intellect, had contrived to instill this obstinacy into Jupiter, with a view to the supervision and guardianship of the wanderer.

The winters in the latitude of Sullivan’s Island are seldom very severe, and in the fall of the year it is a rare event indeed when a fire is considered necessary. About the middle of October, 18—, there occurred, however, a day of remarkable chilliness. Just before

¹ Jan Swammerdam (1637–80), a famous Dutch naturalist who made a great collection of insects and wrote a *General History* of them. He was also a noted anatomist. Before his death he became a hypochondriac and mystic.

² That is, freed from slavery by his owner. Jupiter belonged to the class of “free negroes,” — a class not much tolerated in the far South.

sunset I scrambled my way through the evergreens to the hut of my friend, whom I had not visited for several weeks, — my residence being at that time in Charleston, a distance of nine miles from the island, while the facilities of passage and re-passage were very far behind those of the present day. Upon reaching the hut I rapped, as was my custom, and getting no reply, sought for the key where I knew it was secreted, unlocked the door, and went in. A fine fire was blazing upon the hearth. It was a novelty, and by no means an ungrateful one. I threw off an overcoat, took an armchair by the crackling logs, and awaited patiently the arrival of my hosts.

Soon after dark they arrived, and gave me a most cordial welcome. Jupiter, grinning from ear to ear, bustled about to prepare some marsh-hens for supper. Legrand was in one of his fits — how else shall I term them? — of enthusiasm. He had found an unknown bivalve,¹ forming a new genus, and, more than this, he had hunted down and secured, with Jupiter's assistance, a *scarabæus*² which he believed to be totally new, but in respect to which he wished to have my opinion on the morrow.

"And why not to-night?" I asked, rubbing my hands over the blaze, and wishing the whole tribe of *scarabæi* at the devil.

"Ah, if I had only known you were here!" said

¹ That is, a "mollusk whose shell has two hinged valves, which are opened and shut by appropriate muscles." (*Century Dictionary*.) The oyster is a familiar example of a bivalve.

² The Latin for "beetle." The plural form is given below. Poe's "Gold-Bug" probably belonged to the class known as Metallic Beetles (*Buprestidæ*), which are noted for the splendor and variety of their colors. There are Golden Beetles (*Chrysomelidæ*), but they seem to be too small to fit Poe's description.

Légrand, "but it's so long since I saw you; and how could I foresee that you would pay me a visit this very night of all others? As I was coming home I met Lieutenant G——, from the fort, and, very foolishly, I lent him the bug; so it will be impossible for you to see it until the morning. Stay here to-night, and I will send Jup down for it at sunrise. It is the loveliest thing in creation!"

"What! — sunrise?"

"Nonsense! no! — the bug. It is of a brilliant gold color — about the size of a large hickory-nut — with two jet-black spots near one extremity of the back, and another, somewhat longer, at the other. The *antennæ*¹ are" —

"Dey ain't *no* tin in him, Massa Will, I keep a tell-in' on you," here interrupted Jupiter; "de bug is a goole-bug, solid, ebery bit of him, inside and all, 'sep him wing — neber feel half so hebbly a bug in my life."²

"Well, suppose it is, Jup," replied Légrand, somewhat more earnestly, it seemed to me, than the case demanded; "is that any reason for your letting the birds burn? The color" — here he turned to me — "is really almost enough to warrant Jupiter's idea. You never saw a more brilliant metallic lustre than the scales emit — but of this you cannot judge till to-morrow. In the meantime I can give you some idea of the shape." Saying this, he seated himself at a small table, on which were a pen and ink, but no

¹ That is, the feelers.

² The negro dialect has become a prominent feature of Southern fiction since the civil war. It was employed before, but not so extensively. Simms used it somewhat in his *Yemassee*, eight years before Poe.

paper. He looked for some in a drawer, but found none.

"Never mind," said he at length, "this will answer;" and he drew from his waistcoat pocket a scrap of what I took to be very dirty foolscap, and made upon it a rough drawing with the pen. While he did this I retained my seat by the fire, for I was still chilly. When the design was complete, he handed it to me without rising. As I received it, a loud growl was heard, succeeded by a scratching at the door. Jupiter opened it, and a large Newfoundland, belonging to Legrand, rushed in, leaped upon my shoulders, and loaded me with caresses; for I had shown him much attention during previous visits. When his gambols were over, I looked at the paper, and, to speak the truth, found myself not a little puzzled at what my friend had depicted.

"Well!" I said, after contemplating it for some minutes, "this is a strange *scarabæus*, I must confess: new to me; never saw anything like it before — unless it was a skull, or a death's-head — which it more nearly resembles than anything else that has come under *my* observation."

"A death's-head!" echoed Legrand. "Oh — yes — well, it has something of that appearance upon paper, no doubt. The two upper black spots look like eyes, eh? and the longer one at the bottom like a mouth — and then the shape of the whole is oval."

"Perhaps so," said I; "but, Legrand, I fear you are no artist. I must wait until I see the beetle itself, if I am to form any idea of its personal appearance."

"Well, I don't know," said he a little nettled, "I draw tolerably, — *should* do it at least, — have had

good masters, and flatter myself that I am not quite a blockhead."

"But, my dear fellow, you are joking then," said I; "this is a very passable *skull* — indeed, I may say that it is a very *excellent* skull, according to the vulgar notions about such specimens of physiology¹ — and your *scarabæus* must be the queerest *scarabæus* in the world if it resembles it. Why, we may get up a very thrilling bit of superstition upon this hint. I presume you will call the bug *scarabæus caput hominis*,² or something of that kind — there are many similar titles in the Natural Histories. But where are the *antennæ* you spoke of?"

"The *antennæ*!" said Legrand, who seemed to be getting unaccountably warm upon the subject; "I am sure you must see the *antennæ*. I made them as distinct as they are in the original insect, and I presume that is sufficient."

"Well, well," I said, "perhaps you have — still I don't see them;" and I handed him the paper without additional remark, not wishing to ruffle his temper; but I was much surprised at the turn affairs had taken; his ill-humor puzzled me — and, as for the drawing of the beetle, there were positively *no antennæ* visible, and the whole *did* bear a very close resemblance to the ordinary cuts of a death's-head.

He received the paper very peevishly, and was about to crumple it, apparently to throw it in the fire, when a casual glance at the design seemed suddenly to rivet his attention. In an instant his face

¹ Physiology treats of the functions of living things. "Anatomical specimen" would have been a more correct expression.

² That is, "man's-head beetle," — a mild piece of satire on scientific nomenclature.

grew violently red — in another as excessively pale. For some minutes he continued to scrutinize the drawing minutely where he sat. At length he arose, took a candle from the table, and proceeded to seat himself upon a sea-chest¹ in the farthest corner of the room. Here again he made an anxious examination of the paper, turning it in all directions. He said nothing, however, and his conduct greatly astonished me; yet I thought it prudent not to exacerbate the growing moodiness of his temper by any comment. Presently he took from his coat pocket a wallet, placed the paper carefully in it, and deposited both in a writing-desk, which he locked. He now grew more composed in his demeanor; but his original air of enthusiasm had quite disappeared. Yet he seemed not so much sulky as abstracted. As the evening wore away he became more and more absorbed in reverie, from which no sallies of mine could arouse him. It had been my intention to pass the night at the hut, as I had frequently done before, but, seeing my host in this mood, I deemed it proper to take leave. He did not press me to remain, but, as I departed, he shook my hand with even more than his usual cordiality.

It was about a month after this (and during the interval I had seen nothing of Legrand) when I received a visit, at Charleston, from his man Jupiter. I had never seen the good old negro look so dispirited, and I feared that some serious disaster had befallen my friend.

“Well, Jup,” said I, “what is the matter now? — how is your master?”

¹ Probably a *seaman's chest*, that is, the wooden box containing the outfit of a sailor in the merchant service.

"Why, to speak de troof, massa, him not so berry well as mought be."

"Not well! I am truly sorry to hear it. What does he complain of?"

"Dar! dat 's it! — him nebber 'plain of notin' — but him berry sick for all dat."

"*Very* sick, Jupiter! — why did n't you say so at once? Is he confined to bed?"

"No, dat he ain't! — he ain't 'find nowhar — dat 's just whar de shoe pinch — my mind is got to be berry hebby 'bout poor Massa Will."

"Jupiter, I should like to understand what it is you are talking about. You say your master is sick. Has n't he told you what ails him?"

"Why, massa, 'tain't worf while for to git mad 'bout de matter — Massa Will say noffin' at all ain't de matter wid him — but den what make him go about looking dis here way, wid he head down and he soldiers¹ up, and as white as a gose? And den he keep a syphon all de time" —

"Keeps a what, Jupiter?"

"Keeps a syphon wid de figgurs on de slate — de queerest figgurs I ebber did see. Ise gittin to be skeered, I tell you. Hab for to keep mighty tight eye pon him noovers.² Todder day he gib me slip fore de sun up, and was gone de whole ob de blessed day. I had a big stick ready cut for to gib him

¹ It is dangerous to dogmatize on such a delicate matter as the various shades of negro dialect to be observed throughout the South, but it may at least be questioned whether Poe did not aim here and in other passages at getting a modicum of somewhat thin humor out of his use of dialect rather than at a realistic representation of the speech of the average ante-bellum negro.

² That is, "his manœuvres."

d——d good beating when he did come — but Ise sich a fool dat I had n't de heart arter all — he look so berry poorly.”¹

“Eh? — what? Ah yes! — upon the whole, I think you had better not be too severe with the poor fellow — don't flog him, Jupiter, he can't very well stand it — but can you form no idea of what has occasioned this illness, or rather this change of conduct? Has anything unpleasant happened since I saw you?”

“No, massa, dey ain't bin noffin' onpleasant *since* den — 't was *'fore* den I'm feared — 't was de berry day you was dare.”

“How? what do you mean?”

“Why, massa, I mean de bug — dare now.”

“The *what*?”

“De bug — I'm berry sartain dat Massa Will bin bit somewhere 'bout de head by dat goole-bug.”

“And what cause have you, Jupiter, for such a supposition?”²

“Claws enuff, massa, and mouff too. I nebber did see sich a d——d bug — he kick and he bite ebery ting what cum near him. Massa Will cotch him fuss, but had for to let him go 'gin mighty quick, I tell you — den was de time he must ha' got de bite. I did n't like de look ob de bug mouff, myself, nohow, so I would n't take hold ob him wid my finger, but I cotch him wid a piece ob paper dat I found. I wrap him up in de paper and stuff piece ob it in he mouff — dat was de way.”

¹ Poe may have had authority for representing an old negro as ready to thrash his master, but it is doubtful whether he should have introduced so extravagant a detail.

² The interlocutor is somewhat stilted in his phraseology, a fact which rather serves to set off Jupiter's amusing English.

"And you think, then, that your master was really bitten by the beetle, and that the bite made him sick?"

"I don't t'ink noffin' 'bout it — I nose it. What make him dream 'bout de goole so much, if 't ain't cause he bit by de goole-bug? Ise heerd 'bout dem goole-bugs 'fore dis."

"But how do you know he dreams about gold?"

"How I know? why, 'cause he talk about it *in* he sleep — dat 's how I nose."

"Well, Jup, perhaps you are right; but to what fortunate circumstances am I to attribute the honor of a visit from you to-day?"

"What de matter, massa?"

"Did you bring any message from Mr. Legrand?"

"No, massa, I bring dis here 'pissel;" and here Jupiter handed me a note, which ran thus: —

MY DEAR —:

Why have I not seen you for so long a time? I hope you have not been so foolish as to take offense at any little *brusquerie*¹ of mine; but no, that is improbable.

Since I saw you I have had great cause for anxiety. I have something to tell you, yet scarcely know how to tell it, or whether I should tell it at all.

I have not been quite well for some days past, and poor old Jup annoys me, almost beyond endurance, by his well-meant attentions. Would you believe it? — he had prepared a huge stick, the other day, with which to chastise me for giving him the slip, and spending the day, *solus*, among the hills on the mainland. I verily believe that my ill look alone saved me a flogging.

I have made no addition to my cabinet since we met.

If you can, in any way, make it convenient, come over with Jupiter. Do come. I wish to see you *to-night*, upon

¹ That is, brusqueness, lack of cordiality.

business of importance. I assure you that it is of the *highest* importance.

Ever yours,

WILLIAM LEGRAND.

There was something in the tone of this note which gave me great uneasiness. Its whole style differed materially from that of Legrand. What could he be dreaming of? What new crochet possessed his excitable brain? What "business of the highest importance" could *he* possibly have to transact? Jupiter's account of him boded no good. I dreaded lest the continued pressure of misfortune had, at length, fairly unsettled the reason of my friend. Without a moment's hesitation, therefore, I prepared to accompany the negro.

Upon reaching the wharf, I noticed a scythe and three spades, all apparently new, lying in the bottom of the boat in which we were to embark.

"What is the meaning of all this, Jup?" I inquired.

"Him syfe, massa, and spade."

"Very true; but what are they doing here?"

"Him de syfe and de spade what Massa Will 'sis' 'pon my buying for him in de town, and de debbil's own lot of money I had to gib for 'em."

"But what, in the name of all that is mysterious, is your 'Massa Will' going to do with scythes and spades?"

"Dat's more dan *I* know, and debbil take me if I don't b'lieve 't is more dan he know, too. But it's all cum ob de bug."

Finding that no satisfaction was to be obtained of Jupiter, whose whole intellect seemed to be absorbed by "de bug," I now stepped into the boat and made sail. With a fair and strong breeze we soon ran into

the little cove to the northward of Fort Moultrie, and a walk of some two miles brought us to the hut. It was about three in the afternoon when we arrived. Legrand had been awaiting us in eager expectation. He grasped my hand with a nervous *empressement*¹ which alarmed me and strengthened the suspicions already entertained. His countenance was pale even to ghastliness, and his deep-set eyes glared with unnatural lustre. After some inquiries respecting his health, I asked him, not knowing what better to say, if he had yet obtained the *scarabæus* from Lieutenant G——.

“Oh, yes,” he replied, coloring violently, “I got it from him the next morning. Nothing should tempt me to part with that *scarabæus*. Do you know that Jupiter is quite right about it!”

“In what way?” I asked, with a sad foreboding at heart.

“In supposing it to be a bug of *real gold*.” He said this with an air of profound seriousness, and I felt inexpressibly shocked.

“This bug is to make my fortune,” he continued, with a triumphant smile, “to reinstate me in my family possessions. Is it any wonder, then, that I prize it? Since Fortune has thought fit to bestow it upon me, I have only to use it properly and I shall arrive at the gold of which it is the index. Jupiter, bring me that *scarabæus*!”

“What! de bug, massa? I’d rudder not go fer trubble dat bug — you mus’ git him for your own self.” Hereupon Legrand arose, with a grave and stately air, and brought me the beetle from a glass case in which

¹ That is, demonstrativeness. Poe’s use of French words and phrases is often in bad taste, and sometimes positively ridiculous.

it was enclosed. It was a beautiful *scarabæus*, and, at that time, unknown to naturalists — of course a great prize in a scientific point of view. There were two round black spots near one extremity of the back, and a long one near the other. The scales were exceedingly hard and glossy, with all the appearance of burnished gold. The weight of the insect was very remarkable, and, taking all things into consideration, I could hardly blame Jupiter for his opinion respecting it; but what to make of Legrand's agreement with that opinion, I could not, for the life of me, tell.

"I sent for you," said he, in a grandiloquent tone, when I had completed my examination of the beetle, "I sent for you, that I might have your counsel and assistance in furthering the views of Fate and of the bug" —

"My dear Legrand," I cried, interrupting him, "you are certainly unwell, and had better use some little precautions. You shall go to bed, and I will remain with you a few days, until you get over this. You are feverish and" —

"Feel my pulse," said he.

I felt it, and, to say the truth, found not the slightest indication of fever.

"But you may be ill and yet have no fever. Allow me this once to prescribe for you. In the first place, go to bed. In the next" —

"You are mistaken," he interposed; "I am as well as I can expect to be under the excitement which I suffer. If you really wish me well, you will relieve this excitement."

"And how is this to be done?"

"Very easily. Jupiter and myself are going upon an expedition into the hills, upon the mainland, and,

in this expedition, we shall need the aid of some person in whom we can confide. You are the only one we can trust. Whether we succeed or fail, the excitement which you now perceive in me will be equally allayed."

"I am anxious to oblige you in any way," I replied; "but do you mean to say that this infernal beetle has any connection with your expedition into the hills?"

"It has."

"Then, Legrand, I can become a party to no such absurd proceeding."

"I am sorry — very sorry — for we shall have to try it by ourselves."

"Try it by yourselves! The man is surely mad! — but stay! — how long do you propose to be absent?"

"Probably all night. We shall start immediately, and be back, at all events, by sunrise."

"And will you promise me upon your honor, that when this freak of yours is over, and the bug business (good God!) settled to your satisfaction, you will then return home and follow my advice implicitly, as that of your physician?"

"Yes; I promise; and now let us be off, for we have no time to lose."

With a heavy heart I accompanied my friend. We started about four o'clock, — Legrand, Jupiter, the dog, and myself. Jupiter had with him the scythe and spades, the whole of which he insisted upon carrying, more through fear, it seemed to me, of trusting either of the implements within reach of his master, than from any excess of industry or complaisance. His demeanor was dogged in the extreme, and "dat d——d bug" were the sole words which escaped his lips during the journey. For my own part, I had charge of a couple of dark lanterns, while

Legrand contented himself with the *scarabæus*, which he carried attached to the end of a bit of whip-cord, twirling it to and fro, with the air of a conjurer, as he went. When I observed this last plain evidence of my friend's aberration of mind, I could scarcely refrain from tears. I thought it best, however, to humor his fancy, at least for the present, or until I could adopt some more energetic measures with a chance of success. In the meantime I endeavored, but all in vain, to sound him in regard to the object of the expedition. Having succeeded in inducing me to accompany him, he seemed unwilling to hold conversation upon any topic of minor importance, and to all my questions vouchsafed no other reply than "We shall see!"

We crossed the creek at the head of the island by means of a skiff, and, ascending the high grounds on the shore of the mainland, proceeded in a north-westerly direction, through a tract of country excessively wild and desolate, where no trace of a human footstep was to be seen. Legrand led the way with decision; pausing only for an instant, here and there, to consult what appeared to be certain landmarks of his own contrivance upon a former occasion.

In this manner we journeyed for about two hours, and the sun was just setting when we entered a region infinitely more dreary than any yet seen. It was a species of table-land, near the summit of an almost inaccessible hill, densely wooded from base to pinnacle, and interspersed with huge crags that appeared to lie loosely upon the soil, and in many cases were prevented from precipitating themselves into the valleys below, merely by the support of the trees against which they reclined. Deep ravines, in various directions, gave an air of still sterner solemnity to the scene.

The natural platform to which we had clambered was thickly overgrown with brambles, through which we soon discovered that it would have been impossible to force our way but for the scythe; and Jupiter, by direction of his master, proceeded to clear for us a path to the foot of an enormously tall tulip-tree, which stood, with some eight or ten oaks, upon the level, and far surpassed them all, and all other trees which I had then ever seen, in the beauty of its foliage and form, in the wide spread of its branches, and in the general majesty of its appearance. When we reached this tree, Legrand turned to Jupiter, and asked him if he thought he could climb it. The old man seemed a little staggered by the question, and for some moments made no reply. At length he approached the huge trunk, walked slowly around it, and examined it with minute attention. When he had completed his scrutiny, he merely said: —

“Yes, massa, Jup climb any tree he eber see in he life.”

“Then up with you as soon as possible, for it will soon be too dark to see what we are about.”

“How far mus’ go up, massa?” inquired Jupiter.

“Get up the main trunk first, and then I will tell you which way to go — and here — stop! take this beetle with you.”

“De bug, Massa Will! de goole-bug!” cried the negro, drawing back in dismay, “what for mus’ tote de bug way up de tree? — d——n if I do!”

“If you are afraid, Jup, a great big negro like you, to take hold of a harmless little dead beetle, why, you can carry it up by this string; but if you do not take it up with you in some way, I shall be under the necessity of breaking your head with this shovel.”

“What de matter now, massa?” said Jup, evidently shamed into compliance; “always want fur to raise fuss wid old nigger. Was only funnin’ anyhow. ‘*Me* feered de bug! what I keer for de bug?’”¹ Here he took cautiously hold of the extreme end of the string, and, maintaining the insect as far from his person as circumstances would permit, prepared to ascend the tree.

In youth the tulip-tree, or *Liriodendron tulipifera*,² the most magnificent of American foresters, has a trunk peculiarly smooth, and often rises to a great height without lateral branches; but, in its riper age, the bark becomes gnarled and uneven, while many short limbs make their appearance on the stem. Thus the difficulty of ascension, in the present case, lay more in semblance than in reality. Embracing the huge cylinder as closely as possible with his arms and knees, seizing with his hands some projections, and resting his naked toes upon others, Jupiter, after one or two narrow escapes from falling, at length wriggled himself into the first great fork, and seemed to consider the whole business as virtually accomplished. The *risk* of the achievement was, in fact, now over, although the climber was some sixty or seventy feet from the ground.

“Which way mus’ go now, Massa Will?” he asked.

“Keep up the largest branch — the one on this side,” said Legrand. The negro obeyed him promptly, and apparently with but little trouble; ascending higher and higher, until no glimpse of his squat

¹ In this and other touches Poe shows considerable knowledge of negro character.

² Often known as poplar, or tulip-poplar.

figure could be obtained through the dense foliage which enveloped it. Presently his voice was heard in a sort of halloo.

“How much fudder is got for go?”

“How high up are you?” asked Legrand.

“Ebber so fur,” replied the negro; “can see de sky fru de top ob de tree.”

“Never mind the sky, but attend to what I say. Look down the trunk and count the limbs below you on this side. How many limbs have you passed?”

“One, two, three, four, fibe — I done pass fibe big limb, massa, pon dis side.”

“Then go one limb higher.”

In a few minutes the voice was heard again, announcing that the seventh limb was attained.

“Now, Jup,” cried Legrand, evidently much excited, “I want you to work your way out upon that limb as far as you can. If you see anything strange, let me know.”

By this time what little doubt I might have entertained of my poor friend’s insanity was put finally at rest. I had no alternative but to conclude him stricken with lunacy, and I became seriously anxious about getting him home. While I was pondering upon what was best to be done, Jupiter’s voice was again heard.

“Mos’ feerd for to ventur’ ’pon dis limb berry far — ’t is dead limb putty much all de way.”

“Did you say it was a *dead* limb, Jupiter?” cried Legrand in a quavering voice.

“Yes, massa, him dead as de door-nail — done up for sartain — done departed dis here life.”

“What in the name of heaven shall I do?” asked Legrand, seemingly in the greatest distress.

"Do!" said I, glad of an opportunity to interpose a word, "why, come home and go to bed. Come now! — that's a fine fellow. It's getting late, and, besides, you remember your promise."

"Jupiter," cried he, without heeding me in the least, "do you hear me?"

"Yes, Massa Will, hear you ebber so plain."

"Try the wood well, then, with your knife, and see if you think it *very* rotten."

"Him rotten, massa, sure nuff," replied the negro in a few moments, "but not so berry rotten as mought be. Mought ventur' out leetle way 'pon de limb by myself, dat's true."

"By yourself! What do you mean?"

"Why, I mean de bug. 'Tis *berry* hebby bug. S'pose I drop him down fust, and den de limb won't break wid just de weight of one nigger."

"You infernal scoundrel!" cried Legrand, apparently much relieved, "what do you mean by telling me such nonsense as that? As sure as you drop that beetle, I'll break your neck. Look here, Jupiter, do you hear me?"

"Yes, massa, need n't hollo at poor nigger dat style."

"Well! now listen! — if you will venture out on the limb as far as you think safe, and not let go the beetle, I'll make you a present of a silver dollar as soon as you get down."

"I'm gwine, Massa Will — deed I is," replied the negro very promptly — "mos' out to de eend now."

"*Out to the end!*" here fairly screamed Legrand; "do you say you are out to the end of that limb?"

"Soon be to de eend, massa, — o-o-o-o-oh! Lor-gol-a-marcy! what is dis here 'pon de tree?"

“Well,” cried Legrand, highly delighted, “what is it?”

“Why, ’t ain’t noffin’ but a skull — somebody bin lef’ him head up de tree, and de crows done gobble ebery bit ob de meat off.”

“A skull, you say! Very well; how is it fastened to the limb? What holds it on?”

“Shure ’nuff, massa; mus’ look. Why dis berry curious sarcumstance, ’pon my word — dare’s a great big nail in de skull, what fastens ob it on to de tree.”

“Well now, Jupiter, do exactly as I tell you — do you hear?”

“Yes, massa.”

“Pay attention, then! — find the left eye of the skull.”

“Hum! hoo! dat’s good! why, dare ain’t no eye lef’ at all.”

“Curse your stupidity! do you know your right hand from your left?”

“Yes, I nose dat — nose all ’bout dat — ’t is my lef’ hand what I chops de wood wid.”

“To be sure! you are left-handed; and your left eye is on the same side as your left hand. Now, I suppose you can find the left eye of the skull, or the place where the left eye has been. Have you found it?”

Here was a long pause. At length the negro asked: —

“Is de lef’ eye ob de skull ’pon de same side as de lef’ hand ob de skull, too? — ’cause the skull ain’t got not a bit ob a hand at all — nebber mind! I got de lef’ eye now — here de lef’ eye! what mus’ do wid it?”

“Let the beetle drop through it, as far as the string

will reach, but be careful and not let go your hold of the string."

"All dat done, Massa Will; mighty easy ting for to put de bug fru de hole; look out for him dar below!"

During this colloquy no portion of Jupiter's person could be seen; but the beetle, which he had suffered to descend, was now visible at the end of the string, and glistened, like a globe of burnished gold, in the last rays of the setting sun, some of which still faintly illumined the eminence upon which we stood. The *scarabæus* hung quite clear of any branches, and, if allowed to fall, would have fallen at our feet. Legrand immediately took the scythe, and cleared with it a circular space, three or four yards in diameter, just beneath the insect, and, having accomplished this, ordered Jupiter to let go the string and come down from the tree.

Driving a peg, with great nicety, into the ground, at the precise spot where the beetle fell, my friend now produced from his pocket a tape-measure. Fastening one end of this at that point of the trunk of the tree which was nearest the peg, he unrolled it till it reached the peg, and thence farther unrolled it, in the direction already established by the two points of the tree and the peg, for the distance of fifty feet — Jupiter clearing away the brambles with the scythe. At the spot thus attained a second peg was driven, and about this, as a centre, a rude circle, about four feet in diameter, described. Taking now a spade himself, and giving one to Jupiter and one to me, Legrand begged us to set about digging as quickly as possible.

To speak the truth, I had no especial relish for such amusement at any time, and, at that particular

moment, would most willingly have declined it ; for the night was coming on, and I felt much fatigued with the exercise already taken ; but I saw no mode of escape, and was fearful of disturbing my poor friend's equanimity by a refusal. Could I have depended, indeed, upon Jupiter's aid, I would¹ have had no hesitation in attempting to get the lunatic home by force ; but I was too well assured of the old negro's disposition, to hope that he would assist me, under any circumstances, in a personal contest with his master. I made no doubt that the latter had been infected with some of the innumerable Southern superstitions about money buried, and that his fantasy had received confirmation by the finding of the *scarabæus*, or, perhaps, by Jupiter's obstinacy in maintaining it to be "a bug of real gold." A mind disposed to lunacy would readily be led away by such suggestions, — especially if chiming in with favorite preconceived ideas, — and then I called to mind the poor fellow's speech about the beetle's being "the index of his fortune." Upon the whole, I was sadly vexed and puzzled, but, at length, I concluded to make a virtue of necessity, — to dig with a good will, and thus the sooner to convince the visionary, by ocular demonstration, of the fallacy of the opinions he entertained.

The lanterns having been lit, we all fell to work with a zeal worthy a more rational cause ; and, as the glare fell upon our persons and implements, I could not help thinking how picturesque a group we composed, and how strange and suspicious our labors must have appeared to any interloper who, by chance, might have stumbled upon our whereabouts.

¹ Should Poe have written "should" ?

We dug very steadily for two hours. Little was said; and our chief embarrassment lay in the yelpings of the dog, who took exceeding interest in our proceedings. He at length became so obstreperous, that we grew fearful of his giving the alarm to some stragglers in the vicinity, — or, rather, this was the apprehension of Legrand; for myself, I should have rejoiced at any interruption which might have enabled me to get the wanderer home. The noise was, at length, very effectually silenced by Jupiter, who, getting out of the hole with a dogged air of deliberation, tied the brute's mouth up with one of his suspenders, and then returned, with a grave chuckle, to his task.

When the time mentioned had expired, we had reached a depth of five feet, and yet no signs of any treasure became manifest. A general pause ensued, and I began to hope that the farce was at an end. Legrand, however, although evidently much disconcerted, wiped his brow thoughtfully and recommenced. We had excavated the entire circle of four feet diameter, and now we slightly enlarged the limit, and went to the farther depth of two feet. Still nothing appeared. The gold-seeker, whom I sincerely pitied, at length clambered from the pit, with the bitterest disappointment imprinted upon every feature, and proceeded, slowly and reluctantly, to put on his coat, which he had thrown off at the beginning of his labor. In the meantime I made no remark. Jupiter, at a signal from his master, began to gather up his tools. This done, and the dog having been unmuzzled, we turned in profound silence towards home.

We had taken, perhaps, a dozen steps in this direction, when, with a loud oath, Legrand strode up to

Jupiter, and seized him by the collar. The astonished negro opened his eyes and mouth to the fullest extent, let fall the spades, and fell upon his knees.

"You scoundrel," said Legrand, hissing out the syllables from between his clenched teeth, "you infernal black villain! speak, I tell you! answer me this instant, without prevarication! which, — which is your left eye?"

"Oh, my golly, Massa Will! ain't dis here my lef' eye for sartain?" roared the terrified Jupiter, placing his hand upon his *right* organ of vision, and holding it there with a desperate pertinacity, as if in immediate dread of his master's attempt at a gouge.

"I thought so! I knew it! hurrah!" vociferated Legrand, letting the negro go, and executing a series of curvets and caracoles,¹ much to the astonishment of his valet, who, arising from his knees, looked mutely from his master to myself, and then from myself to his master.

"Come! we must go back," said the latter; "the game's not up yet;" and he again led the way to the tulip-tree.

"Jupiter," said he, when he reached its foot, "come here! was the skull nailed to the limb with the face outwards, or with the face to the limb?"

"De face was out, massa, so dat de crows could get at de eyes good, widout any trouble."

"Well, then, was it this eye or that through which you dropped the beetle?" — here Legrand touched each of Jupiter's eyes.

"'T was dis eye, massa — de lef' eye — jis as you tell me," and here it was his right eye that the negro indicated.

¹ Also *caracol*, from the French word for "snail," the half-turn which a horseman makes to right or left — a prancing.

“That will do — we must try it again.”

Here my friend, about whose madness I now saw, or fancied that I saw, certain indications of method, removed the peg which marked the spot where the beetle fell, to a spot about three inches to the westward of its former position. Taking, now, the tape-measure from the nearest point of the trunk to the peg, as before, and continuing the extension in a straight line to the distance of fifty feet, a spot was indicated, removed by several yards from the point at which we had been digging.

Around the new position a circle, somewhat larger than in the former instance, was now described, and we again set to work with the spades. I was dreadfully weary, but scarcely understanding what had occasioned the change in my thoughts, I felt no longer any great aversion from the labor imposed. I had become most unaccountably interested — nay, even excited. Perhaps there was something, amid all the extravagant demeanor of Legrand — some air of forethought, or of deliberation, which impressed me. I dug eagerly, and now and then caught myself actually looking, with something that very much resembled expectation, for the fancied treasure, the vision of which had demented my unfortunate companion. At a period when such vagaries of thought most fully possessed me, and when we had been at work perhaps an hour and a half, we were again interrupted by the violent howlings of the dog. His uneasiness in the first instance had been, evidently, but the result of playfulness or caprice, but he now assumed a bitter and serious tone. Upon Jupiter's again attempting to muzzle him he made furious resistance, and, leaping into the hole, tore up the mould frantically with his

slaws. In a few seconds he had uncovered a mass of human bones, forming two complete skeletons, intermingled with several buttons of metal, and what appeared to be the dust of decayed woolen. One or two strokes of a spade upturned the blade of a large Spanish knife, and, as we dug farther, three or four loose pieces of gold and silver coin came to light.

At sight of these the joy of Jupiter could scarcely be restrained, but the countenance of his master wore an air of extreme disappointment. He urged us, however, to continue our exertions, and the words were hardly uttered when I stumbled and fell forward, having caught the toe of my boot in a large ring of iron that lay half buried in the loose earth.

We now worked in earnest, and never did I pass ten minutes of more intense excitement. During this interval we had fairly unearthed an oblong chest of wood which, from its perfect preservation and wonderful hardness, had plainly been subjected to some mineralizing process, — perhaps that of the bichloride of mercury.¹ This box was three feet and a half long, three feet broad, and two and a half feet deep. It was firmly secured by bands of wrought iron, riveted, and forming a kind of trellis-work over the whole. On each side of the chest, near the top, were three rings of iron — six in all — by means of which a firm hold could be obtained by six persons. Our utmost united endeavors served only to disturb the coffer very slightly in its bed. We at once saw the impossibility of removing so great a weight. Luckily, the sole fastenings of the lid consisted of two sliding bolts. These we drew back — trembling and

¹ That is, the mercuric chloride (HgCl_2), or corrosive sublimate.

panting with anxiety. In an instant, a treasure of incalculable value lay gleaming before us. As the rays of the lanterns fell within the pit, there flashed upwards a glow and a glare, from a confused heap of gold and of jewels, that absolutely dazzled our eyes.

I shall not pretend to describe the feelings with which I gazed. Amazement was, of course, predominant. Legrand appeared exhausted with excitement, and spoke very few words. Jupiter's countenance wore, for some minutes, as deadly a pallor as it is possible, in the nature of things, for any negro's visage to assume. He seemed stupefied — thunder-stricken. Presently he fell upon his knees in the pit, and, burying his naked arms up to the elbows in gold, let them there remain, as if enjoying the luxury of a bath. At length, with a deep sigh, he exclaimed, as if in a soliloquy :—

“And dis all cum ob de goole-bug! de putty goole-bug! de poor little goole-bug, what I ’boosed in dat sabage kind ob style! Ain’t you ’shamed ob yourself, nigger?—answer me dat!”

It became necessary, at last, that I should arouse both master and valet to the expediency of removing the treasure. It was growing late, and it behooved us to make exertion, that we might get everything housed before daylight. It was difficult to say what should be done, and much time was spent in deliberation — so confused were the ideas of all. We, finally, lightened the box by removing two thirds of its contents, when we were enabled, with some trouble, to raise it from the hole. The articles taken out were deposited among the brambles, and the dog left to guard them, with strict orders from Jupiter neither,

upon any pretense, to stir from the spot, nor to open his mouth until our return. We then hurriedly made for home with the chest, reaching the hut in safety, but after excessive toil, at one o'clock in the morning. Worn out as we were, it was not in human nature to do more just now. We rested until two, and had supper, starting for the hills immediately afterwards, armed with three stout sacks, which, by good luck, were upon the premises. A little before four we arrived at the pit, divided the remainder of the booty as equally as might be among us, and, leaving the holes unfilled, again set out for the hut, at which, for the second time, we deposited our golden burdens, just as the first streaks of the dawn gleamed from over the treetops in the east.

We were now thoroughly broken down; but the intense excitement of the time denied us repose. After an unquiet slumber of some three or four hours' duration, we arose, as if by preconcert, to make examination of our treasure.

The chest had been full to the brim, and we spent the whole day, and the greater part of the next night, in a scrutiny of its contents. There had been nothing like order or arrangement. Everything had been heaped in promiscuously. Having assorted all with care, we found ourselves possessed of even vaster wealth than we had at first supposed. In coin there was rather more than four hundred and fifty thousand dollars — estimating the value of the pieces, as accurately as we could, by the tables of the period. There was not a particle of silver. All was gold of antique date and of great variety, — French, Spanish, and German money, with a few English guineas, and

some counters,¹ of which we had never seen specimens before. There were several very large and heavy coins, so worn that we could make nothing of their inscriptions. There was no American money.² The value of the jewels we found more difficulty in estimating. There were diamonds — some of them exceedingly large and fine — a hundred and ten in all, and not one of them small; eighteen rubies of remarkable brilliancy; three hundred and ten emeralds, all very beautiful; and twenty-one sapphires, with an opal. These stones had all been broken from their settings and thrown loose in the chest. The settings themselves, which we picked out from among the other gold, appeared to have been beaten up with hammers, as if to prevent identification. Besides all this, there was a vast quantity of solid gold ornaments, — nearly two hundred massive finger and ear rings; rich chains — thirty of these, if I remember; eighty-three very large and heavy crucifixes; five gold censers of great value; a prodigious golden punch-bowl, ornamented with richly-chased vine-leaves and Bacchanalian figures;³ with two sword-handles exquisitely embossed, and many other smaller articles which I cannot recollect. The weight of these valuables exceeded three hundred and fifty pounds avoirdupois; and in this estimate I have not included one

¹ That is, pieces of money or coins. See *Century Dictionary* for the various meanings of the word.

² Because of the antiquity of the treasure, which had been buried before coinage was at all common in this country. Foreign coins were made use of until the establishment of the Union, and even after.

³ That is, figures representing men and women drinking and dancing, as in the festivals of Bacchus.

hundred and ninety-seven superb gold watches, three of the number being worth each five hundred dollars, if one. Many of them were very old, and as time-keepers valueless, the works having suffered, more or less, from corrosion; but all were richly jeweled and in cases of great worth. We estimated the entire contents of the chest, that night, at a million and a half of dollars; and, upon the subsequent disposal of the trinkets and jewels (a few being retained for our own use), it was found that we had greatly undervalued the treasure.

When, at length, we had concluded our examination, and the intense excitement of the time had in some measure subsided, Legrand, who saw that I was dying with impatience for a solution of this most extraordinary riddle, entered into a full detail of all the circumstances connected with it.

"You remember," said he, "the night when I handed you the rough sketch I had made of the *scarabæus*. You recollect, also, that I became quite vexed at you for insisting that my drawing resembled a death's-head. When you first made this assertion I thought you were jesting; but afterwards I called to mind the peculiar spots on the back of the insect, and admitted to myself that your remark had some little foundation in fact. Still, the sneer at my graphic powers irritated me,—for I am considered a good artist,—and, therefore, when you handed me the scrap of parchment, I was about to crumple it up and throw it angrily into the fire."

"The scrap of paper, you mean," said I.

"No; it had much of the appearance of paper, and at first I supposed it to be such, but when I came to draw upon it, I discovered it at once to be a piece of

very thin parchment. It was quite dirty, you remember. Well, as I was in the very act of crumpling it up, my glance fell upon the sketch at which you had been looking, and you may imagine my astonishment when I perceived, in fact, the figure of a death's-head just where, it seemed to me, I had made the drawing of the beetle. For a moment I was too much amazed to think with accuracy. I knew that my design was very different in detail from this, although there was a certain similarity in general outline. Presently I took a candle, and seating myself at the other end of the room, proceeded to scrutinize the parchment more closely. Upon turning it over, I saw my own sketch upon the reverse, just as I had made it. My first idea, now, was mere surprise at the really remarkable similarity of outline — at the singular coincidence involved in the fact that, unknown to me, there should have been a skull upon the other side of the parchment, immediately beneath my figure of the *scarabæus*, and that this skull, not only in outline, but in size, should so closely resemble my drawing. I say the singularity of this coincidence absolutely stupefied me for a time. This is the usual effect of such coincidences. The mind struggles to establish a connection — a sequence of cause and effect — and, being unable to do so, suffers a species of temporary paralysis. But when I recovered from this stupor, there dawned upon me gradually a conviction which startled me even far more than the coincidence. I began distinctly, positively, to remember that there had been *no* drawing upon the parchment when I made my sketch of the *scarabæus*. I became perfectly certain of this; for I recollected turning up first one side and then the other, in search of the

cleanest spot. Had the skull been then there, of course, I could not have failed to notice it. Here was indeed a mystery which I felt it impossible to explain; but, even at that early moment, there seemed to glimmer, faintly, within the most remote and secret chambers of my intellect, a glowworm-like conception of that truth which last night's adventure brought to so magnificent a demonstration. I arose at once, and putting the parchment securely away, dismissed all further reflection until I should be alone.

“When you had gone, and when Jupiter was fast asleep, I betook myself to a more methodical investigation of the affair. In the first place I considered the manner in which the parchment had come into my possession. The spot where we discovered the *scarabæus* was on the coast of the mainland, about a mile eastward of the island, and but a short distance above high-water mark. Upon my taking hold of it, it gave me a sharp bite, which caused me to let it drop. Jupiter, with his accustomed caution, before seizing the insect, which had flown towards him, looked about him for a leaf, or something of that nature, by which to take hold of it. It was at this moment that his eyes, and mine also, fell upon the scrap of parchment, which I then supposed to be paper. It was lying half buried in the sand, a corner sticking up. Near the spot where we found it, I observed the remnants of the hull of what appeared to have been a ship's long boat. The wreck seemed to have been there for a very great while; for the resemblance to boat timbers could scarcely be traced.

“Well, Jupiter picked up the parchment, wrapped the beetle in it, and gave it to me. Soon afterwards

we turned to go home, and on the way met Lieutenant G——. I showed him the insect, and he begged me to let him take it to the fort. Upon my consenting, he thrust it forthwith into his waistcoat pocket, without the parchment in which it had been wrapped, and which I had continued to hold in my hand during his inspection. Perhaps he dreaded my changing my mind, and thought it best to make sure of the prize at once, — you know how enthusiastic he is on all subjects connected with Natural History. At the same time, without being conscious of it, I must have deposited the parchment in my own pocket.

“You remember that when I went to the table, for the purpose of making a sketch of the beetle, I found no paper where it was usually kept. I looked in the drawer, and found none there. I searched my pockets, hoping to find an old letter, when my hand fell upon the parchment. I thus detail the precise mode in which it came into my possession; for the circumstances impressed me with peculiar force.

“No doubt you will think me fanciful, but I had already established a kind of *connection*. I had put together two links of a great chain. There was a boat lying upon a seacoast, and not far from the boat was a parchment — *not a paper* — with a skull depicted upon it. You will, of course, ask, ‘Where is the connection?’ I reply that the skull, or death’s-head, is the well-known emblem of the pirate. The flag of the death’s-head is hoisted in all engagements.

“I have said that the scrap was parchment, and not paper. Parchment is durable — almost imperishable. Matters of little moment are rarely consigned to parchment, since, for the mere ordinary purposes of drawing or writing, it is not nearly so well adapted

as paper. This reflection suggested some meaning — some relevancy — in the death's-head. I did not fail to observe, also, the *form* of the parchment. Although one of its corners had been, by some accident, destroyed, it could be seen that the original form was oblong. It was just such a slip, indeed, as might have been chosen for a memorandum — for a record of something to be long remembered and carefully preserved."

"But," I interposed, "you say that the skull was *not* upon the parchment when you made the drawing of the beetle. How, then, do you trace any connection between the boat and the skull — since this latter, according to your own admission, must have been designed (God only knows how or by whom) at some period subsequent to your sketching the *scarabæus*?"

"Ah, hereupon turns the whole mystery; although the secret, at this point, I had comparatively little difficulty in solving. My steps were sure, and could afford but a single result. I reasoned, for example, thus: When I drew the *scarabæus*, there was no skull apparent upon the parchment. When I had completed the drawing I gave it to you, and observed you narrowly until you returned it. *You*, therefore, did not design the skull, and no one else was present to do it. Then it was not done by human agency. And nevertheless it was done.

"At this stage of my reflections I endeavored to remember, and *did* remember, with entire distinctness, every incident which occurred about the period in question. The weather was chilly (oh, rare and happy accident!), and a fire was blazing upon the hearth. I was heated with exercise, and sat near the table. You, however, had drawn a chair close to the chimney. Just as I placed the parchment in *your*

hand, and as you were in the act of inspecting it, Wolf, the Newfoundland, entered, and leaped upon your shoulders. With your left hand you caressed him and kept him off, while your right, holding the parchment, was permitted to fall listlessly between your knees, and in close proximity to the fire. At one moment I thought the blaze had caught it, and was about to caution you, but before I could speak you had withdrawn it, and were engaged in its examination. When I considered all these particulars, I doubted not for a moment that *heat* had been the agent in bringing to light, upon the parchment, the skull which I saw designed upon it. You are well aware that chemical preparations exist, and have existed time out of mind, by means of which it is possible to write upon either paper or vellum, so that the characters shall become visible only when subjected to the action of fire. Zaffre, digested in *aqua regia*, and diluted with four times its weight of water, is sometimes employed; a green tint results. The regulus of cobalt, dissolved in spirit of nitre, gives a red.¹ These colors disappear at longer or shorter intervals after the material written upon cools, but again become apparent upon the re-application of heat.

“I now scrutinized the death’s-head with care. Its

¹ Zaffre, or zaffer, is the residuum of cobalt-producing ores after the volatile matters have been expelled by roasting. *Aqua regia* is a mixture of nitric and hydrochloric acids, which is called “royal water” because it can dissolve gold. *Regulus* is a term applied in alchemy and early chemistry to the “reduced or metallic mass obtained in the treatment of various ores.” For the uses of the metal cobalt and the curious derivation of the name from “Kobold,” the demon of the mines, as well as for further explanations connected with this note, see *Century Dictionary* and *Encycl. Brit.* article “Metallurgy.”

outer edges — the edges of the drawing nearest the edge of the vellum — were far more *distinct* than the others. It was clear that the action of the caloric¹ had been imperfect or unequal. I immediately kindled a fire, and subjected every portion of the parchment to a glowing heat. At first, the only effect was the strengthening of the faint lines in the skull; but, upon persevering in the experiment, there became visible, at the corner of the slip diagonally opposite to the spot in which the death's-head was delineated, the figure of what I at first supposed to be a goat. A closer scrutiny, however, satisfied me that it was intended for a kid."

"Ha! ha!" said I; "to be sure I have no right to laugh at you, — a million and a half of money is too serious a matter for mirth, — but you are not about to establish a third link in your chain: you will not find any especial connection between your pirates and a goat; pirates, you know, have nothing to do with goats; they appertain to the farming interest."

"But I have said that the figure was *not* that of a goat."

"Well, a kid, then — pretty much the same thing."

"Pretty much, but not altogether," said Legrand. "You may have heard of one *Captain Kidd*.² I at

¹ That is, the heat.

² William Kidd was a Scotchman who in the latter part of the seventeenth century won quite a reputation as a bold sea-captain. He had left the service and was living in retirement in New York when his skilful seamanship brought him to the notice of the Earl of Bellomont, the Colonial Governor who had been commissioned by King William III. to suppress the pirates who were then a terror to honest craft both on the shores of America and in the Indian Ocean. A private company was formed in London which equipped a ship and sent her out with Kidd as captain

once looked on the figure of the animal as a kind of punning or hieroglyphical signature. I say signature, because its position upon the vellum suggested this idea. The death's-head at the corner diagonally opposite had, in the same manner, the air of a stamp, or seal. But I was sorely put out by the absence of all else — of the body to my imagined instrument — of the text for my context."

"I presume you expected to find a letter between the stamp and the signature."

"Something of that kind. The fact is, I felt irresistibly impressed with a presentiment of some vast good fortune impending. I can scarcely say why. Perhaps, after all, it was rather a desire than an actual belief; but do you know that Jupiter's silly words, about the bug being of solid gold,¹ had a remarkable effect upon my fancy? And then the series of accidents and coincidences — these were so *very* extraordinary. Do you observe how mere an accident it was that these events should have occurred upon the *sole*

He proceeded first to New York, then to Madagascar, and soon afterwards it was rumored that he had become a pirate. About two years later (1699) he returned to the American coast and entered into negotiations with the colonial authorities, by whom he was persuaded to go to Boston. There he was arrested with several of his men and sent to England. He was not convicted of piracy, but was found guilty of murdering one of his crew in a fit of passion, and was hanged with nine of his accomplices on May 24, 1701. He had previously buried some goods and treasures at Gardiner's Island, which were recovered. The total amount of treasure, cargo, and money taken from him at the time of his arrest was about £14,000, but extravagant rumors were long afloat concerning still undiscovered treasure, buried along the Atlantic coast. (See *Appleton's Cyclopædia of American Biography*.)

¹ Is this construction, which occurs more than once, correct?

day of all the year in which it has been, or may be, sufficiently cool for fire, and that without the fire, or without the intervention of the dog at the precise moment in which he appeared, I should never have become aware of the death's-head, and so never the possessor of the treasure?"

"But proceed — I am all impatience."

"Well; you have heard, of course, the many stories current — the thousand vague rumors afloat about money buried, somewhere upon the Atlantic coast, by Kidd and his associates. These rumors must have had some foundation in fact. And that the rumors have existed so long and so continuously could have resulted, it appeared to me, only from the circumstance of the buried treasure still *remaining* entombed. Had Kidd concealed his plunder for a time, and afterwards reclaimed it, the rumors would scarcely have reached us in their present unvarying form. You will observe that the stories told are all about money-seekers, not about money-finders. Had the pirate recovered his money, there the affair would have dropped. It seemed to me that some accident — say the loss of a memorandum indicating its locality — had deprived him of the means of recovering it, and that this accident had become known to his followers, who otherwise might never have heard that treasure had been concealed at all, and who, busying themselves in vain, because unguided, attempts to regain it, had given first birth, and then universal currency, to the reports which are now so common. Have you ever heard of any important treasure being unearthed along the coast?"

"Never."

"But that Kidd's accumulations were immense is well known. I took it for granted, therefore, that the

earth still held them ; and you will scarcely be surprised when I tell you that I felt a hope, nearly amounting to certainty, that the parchment so strangely found involved a lost record of the place of deposit."

"But how did you proceed?"

"I held the vellum again to the fire, after increasing the heat ; but nothing appeared. I now thought it possible that the coating of dirt might have something to do with the failure ; so I carefully rinsed the parchment by pouring warm water over it, and, having done this, I placed it in a tin pan, with the skull downwards, and put the pan upon a furnace of lighted charcoal. In a few minutes, the pan having become thoroughly heated, I removed the slip, and to my inexpressible joy, found it spotted, in several places, with what appeared to be figures arranged in lines. Again I placed it in the pan, and suffered it to remain another minute. Upon taking it off, the whole was just as you see it now."

Here Legrand, having reheated the parchment, submitted it to my inspection. The following characters were rudely traced, in a red tint, between the death's-head and the goat: —

53†††305))6*;4826)4†.)4†);806*;48†8¶60))85;;]8*;:†*8†83(8
8)5*†;46(;88*96*?;8)*†(;485);5*†2:*†(;4956*2(5*—4)8¶8*;40
69285);6†8)4††;1(†9;48081;8:8†1;48†85;4)485†528806*81(†9
;48;(88;4(†?34;48)4†;161;:188;†?;

"But," said I, returning him the slip, "I am as much in the dark as ever. Were all the jewels of Golconda¹ awaiting me on my solution of this enigma,

¹ A town in India once famous as a depot for diamonds. The name in connection with such words as "jewels," "gems," etc., has become quite a proverbial expression. (See *Ency. Brit.*)

I am quite sure that I should be unable to earn them."

"And yet," said Legrand, "the solution is by no means so difficult as you might be led to imagine from the first hasty inspection of the characters. These characters, as any one might readily guess, form a cipher, that is to say, they convey a meaning; but then, from what is known of Kidd, I could not suppose him capable of constructing any of the more abstruse cryptographs. I made up my mind, at once, that this was of a simple species — such, however, as would appear, to the crude intellect of the sailor, absolutely insoluble without the key."

"And you really solved it?"

"Readily; I have solved others of an abstruseness ten thousand times greater. Circumstances, and a certain bias of mind, have led me to take interest in such riddles, and it may well be doubted whether human ingenuity can construct an enigma of the kind which human ingenuity may not, by proper application, resolve. In fact, having once established connected and legible characters, I scarcely gave a thought to the mere difficulty of developing their import.¹

"In the present case — indeed, in all cases of secret writing — the first question regards the *language* of the cipher; for the principles of solution, so far especially as the more simple ciphers are concerned, depend upon, and are varied by, the genius of the particular idiom. In general, there is no alternative but experiment (directed by probabilities) of every tongue known to him who attempts the solution, until the true one be attained. But, with the cipher now before us, all difficulty was removed by the signature. The

¹ See Poe's essay on *Cryptography*.

pun upon the word 'Kidd' is appreciable in no other language than the English. But for this consideration I should have begun my attempts with the Spanish and French, as the tongues in which a secret of this kind would most naturally have been written by a pirate of the Spanish main.¹ As it was, I assumed the cryptograph to be English.

"You observe there are no divisions between the words. Had there been divisions, the task would have been comparatively easy. In such case I should have commenced with a collation and analysis of the shorter words; and had a word of a single letter occurred, as is most likely (*a* or *I*, for example), I should have considered the solution as assured. But, there being no division, my first step was to ascertain the predominant letters, as well as the least frequent. Counting all, I constructed a table thus:—

Of the character 8 there are 33.

;	"	26.
4	"	19.
†)	"	16.
*	"	13.
5	"	12.
6	"	11.
†1	"	8.
0	"	6.
92	"	5.
:3	"	4.
?	"	3.
¶	"	2.
]—.	"	1.

¹ That is, the northeastern portion of South America and the adjoining Caribbean Sea. Pirates often infested the North American coast. One of Simms's best novels, *The Cacique of Kiawah*, deals with those that long baffled the authorities of the Carolinas.

“Now, in English, the letter which most frequently occurs is *e*. Afterwards, the succession runs thus : *a o i d h n r s t u y c f g l m w b k p q x z*. *E* predominates, however, so remarkably that an individual sentence of any length is rarely seen in which it is not the prevailing character.

“Here, then, we have, in the very beginning, the groundwork for something more than a mere guess. The general use which may be made of the table is obvious — but in this particular cipher we shall only very partially require its aid. As our predominant character is 8, we will commence by assuming it as the *e* of the natural alphabet. To verify the supposition, let us observe if the 8 be seen often in couples — for *e* is doubled with great frequency in English — in such words, for example, as ‘meet,’ ‘fleet,’ ‘speed,’ ‘seen,’ ‘been,’ ‘agree,’ etc. In the present instance we see it doubled no less than five times, although the cryptograph is brief.

“Let us assume 8, then, as *e*. Now of all *words* in the language, ‘the’ is most usual ; let us see, therefore, whether there are not repetitions of any three characters, in the same order of collocation, the last of them being 8. If we discover repetitions of such letters, so arranged, they will most probably represent the word ‘the.’ Upon inspection, we find no less than seven such arrangements, the characters being ;48. We may, therefore, assume that the semicolon represents *t*, that 4 represents *h*, and that 8 represents *e*, — the last being now well confirmed. Thus a great step has been taken.

“But, having established a single word, we are enabled to establish a vastly important point ; that is to say, several commencements and terminations of

other words. Let us refer, for example, to the last instance but one, in which the combination ;48 occurs, — not far from the end of the cipher. We know that the semicolon immediately ensuing is the commencement of a word, and, of the six characters succeeding this ‘the,’ we are cognizant of no less than five. Let us set these characters down, thus, by the letters we know them to represent, leaving a space for the unknown —

t eeth.

“Here we are enabled, at once, to discard the ‘*th*,’ as forming no portion of the word commencing with the first *t*; since, by experiment of the entire alphabet for a letter adapted to the vacancy, we perceive that no word can be formed of which this *th* can be a part. We are thus narrowed into

t ee,

and, going through the alphabet, if necessary, as before, we arrive at the word ‘tree,’ as the sole possible reading. We thus gain another letter, *r*, represented by (, with the words ‘the tree’ in juxtaposition.

“Looking beyond these words, for a short distance, we again see the combination ;48, and employ it by way of *termination* to what immediately precedes. We have thus this arrangement :

the tree ;4(‡?34 the,

or, substituting the natural letters, where known, it reads thus :

the tree thr‡?3h the.

“Now, if, in place of the unknown characters, we leave blank spaces, or substitute dots, we read thus :

the tree thr...h the,

when the word ‘*through*’ makes itself evident at once. But the discovery gives us three new letters, *o*, *u*, and *g*, represented by ‡ ? and 3.

“Looking now, narrowly, through the cipher for combinations of known characters, we find, not very far from the beginning, this arrangement,

83(88, or, egree,

which, plainly, is the conclusion of the word ‘degree,’ and gives us another letter, *d*, represented by †.

“Four letters beyond the word ‘degree,’ we perceive the combination,

;46(;88*.

“Translating the known characters, and representing the unknown by dots, as before, we read thus:

th.rtee,

an arrangement immediately suggestive of the word ‘thirteen,’ and again furnishing us with two new characters, *i* and *n*, represented by 6 and *.

“Referring, now, to the beginning of the cryptograph, we find the combination,

53‡‡‡.

“Translating, as before, we obtain

. good,

which assures us that the first letter is *A*, and that the first two words are ‘*A good*.’

“To avoid confusion, it is now time that we arrange our key, as far as discovered, in a tabular form. It will stand thus:

5 represents a

† “ d

8 “ e

3 “ g

4 “ h

6 “ i

* “ n

‡ “ o

(“ r

; “ t

"We have, therefore, no less than ten of the most important letters represented, and it will be unnecessary to proceed with the details of the solution. I have said enough to convince you that ciphers of this nature are readily soluble, and to give you some insight into the rationale of their development. But be assured that the specimen before us appertains to the very simplest species of cryptograph. It now only remains to give you the full translation of the characters upon the parchment, as unriddled. Here it is:—

"A good glass in the bishop's hostel in the devil's seat twenty-one degrees and thirteen minutes north-east and by north main branch seventh limb east side shoot from the left eye of the death's-head a bee-line from the tree through the shot fifty feet out."

"But," said I, "the enigma seems still in as bad a condition as ever. How is it possible to extort a meaning from all this jargon about 'devil's seats,' 'death's-heads,' and 'bishop's hotels?'"

"I confess," replied Legrand, "that the matter still wears a serious aspect, when regarded with a casual glance. My first endeavor was to divide the sentence into the natural division intended by the cryptographist."

"You mean to punctuate it?"

"Something of that kind."

"But how was it possible to effect this?"

"I reflected that it had been a *point* with the writer to run his words together without division, so as to increase the difficulty of solution. Now, a not over acute man, in pursuing such an object, would be nearly certain to overdo the matter. When, in the course of his composition, he arrived at a break in his subject which would naturally require a pause, or a

point, he would be exceedingly apt¹ to run his characters, at this place, more than usually close together. If you will observe the MS. in the present instance, you will easily detect five such cases of unusual crowding. Acting on this hint, I made the division thus:—

“*‘A good glass in the bishop’s hostel in the devil’s seat — twenty-one degrees and thirteen minutes — northeast and by north — main branch seventh limb east side — shoot from the left eye of the death’s head — a bee-line from the tree through the shot fifty feet out.’*”

“Even this division,” said I, “leaves me still in the dark.”

“It left me also in the dark,” replied Legrand, “for a few days, during which I made diligent inquiry, in the neighborhood of Sullivan’s Island, for any building which went by the name of the ‘Bishop’s Hotel,’ — for of course I dropped the obsolete word ‘hostel.’ Gaining no information on the subject, I was on the point of extending my sphere of search, and proceeding in a more systematic manner, when, one morning, it entered into my head, quite suddenly, that this ‘Bishop’s Hostel’ might have some reference to an old family, of the name of Bessop, which, time out of mind, had held possession of an ancient manor-house, about four miles to the northward of the island. I accordingly went over to the plantation, and reinstituted my inquiries among the older negroes of the place. At length one of the most aged of the women said that she had heard of such a place as *Bessop’s Castle*, and thought that she could guide me to it, but that it was not a castle, nor a tavern, but a high rock.

¹ Should “apt” be used thus? Notice the use of “manor-house” below.

“I offered to pay her well for her trouble, and, after some demur, she consented to accompany me to the spot. We found it without much difficulty, when, dismissing her, I proceeded to examine the place. The ‘castle’ consisted of an irregular assemblage of cliffs and rocks — one of the latter being quite remarkable for its height as well as for its insulated and artificial appearance. I clambered to its apex, and then felt much at a loss as to what should be next done.

“While I was busied in reflection, my eyes fell upon a narrow ledge in the eastern face of the rock, perhaps a yard below the summit upon which I stood. This ledge projected about eighteen inches, and was not more than a foot wide, while a niche in the cliff just above it gave it a rude resemblance to one of the hollow-backed chairs used by our ancestors. I made no doubt that here was the ‘devil’s seat’ alluded¹ to in the MS., and now I seemed to grasp the full secret of the riddle.

“The ‘good glass,’ I knew, could have reference to nothing but a telescope; for the word ‘glass’ is rarely employed in any other sense by seamen. Now here, I at once saw, was a telescope to be used, and a definite point of view, *admitting no variation*, from which to use it. Nor did I hesitate to believe that the phrase ‘twenty-one degrees and thirteen minutes’ and ‘northeast and by north,’ were intended as directions for the levelling of the glass. Greatly excited by these discoveries, I hurried home, procured a telescope, and returned to the rock.

“I let myself down to the ledge, and found that it was impossible to retain a seat upon it except in one

¹ Is this a correct use of the word ?

particular position. This fact confirmed my preconceived idea. I proceeded to use the glass. Of course, the 'twenty-one degrees and thirteen minutes' could allude to nothing but elevation above the visible horizon, since the horizontal direction was clearly indicated by the words, 'northeast and by north.' This latter direction I at once established by means of a pocket-compass; then, pointing the glass as nearly at an angle of twenty-one degrees of elevation as I could do it by guess, I moved it cautiously up or down, until my attention was arrested by a circular rift or opening in the foliage of a large tree that overtopped its fellows in the distance. In the centre of this rift I perceived a white spot, but could not, at first, distinguish what it was. Adjusting the focus of the telescope, I again looked, and now made it out to be a human skull.

"On this discovery I was so sanguine as to consider the enigma solved; for the phrase 'main branch, seventh limb, east side' could refer only to the position of the skull on the tree, while 'shoot from the left eye of the death's-head' admitted also of but one interpretation, in regard to a search for buried treasure. I perceived that the design was to drop a bullet from the left eye of the skull, and that a bee-line, or, in other words, a straight line, drawn from the nearest point of the trunk through 'the shot' (or the spot where the bullet fell) and thence extended to a distance of fifty feet, would indicate a definite point — and beneath this point I thought it at least *possible* that a deposit of value lay concealed."

"All this," I said, "is exceedingly clear, and, although ingenious, still simple and explicit. When you left the Bishop's Hotel, what then?"

“Why, having carefully taken the bearings of the tree, I turned homewards. The instant that I left the ‘devil’s seat,’ however, the circular rift vanished; nor could I get a glimpse of it afterwards, turn as I would. What seems to me the chief ingenuity in this whole business is the fact (for repeated experiment has convinced me it *is* a fact) that the circular opening in question is visible from no other attainable point of view than that afforded by the narrow ledge on the face of the rock.

“In this expedition to the ‘Bishop’s Hotel’ I had been attended by Jupiter, who had no doubt observed for some weeks past the abstraction of my demeanor, and took especial care not to leave me alone. But, on the next day, getting up very early, I contrived to give him the slip, and went into the hills in search of the tree. After much toil I found it. When I came home at night my valet proposed to give me a flogging. With the rest of the adventure I believe you are as well acquainted as myself.”

“I suppose,” said I, “you missed the spot, in the first attempt at digging, through Jupiter’s stupidity in letting the bug fall through the right instead of through the left eye of the skull.”

“Precisely. This mistake made a difference of about two inches and a half in the ‘shot,’ — that is to say, in the position of the peg nearest the tree; and had the treasure been *beneath* the ‘shot,’ the error would have been of little moment; but the ‘shot,’ together with the nearest point of the tree, were merely two points for the establishment of a line of direction; of course the error, however trivial in the beginning, increased as we proceeded with the line, and by the time we had gone fifty feet, threw us quite

off the scent. But for my deep-seated convictions that treasure was here somewhere actually buried, we might have had all our labor in vain."

"I presume the fancy of *the skull* — of letting fall a bullet through the skull's eye — was suggested to Kidd by the piratical flag. No doubt he felt a kind of poetical consistency in recovering his money through this ominous insignium."¹

"Perhaps so; still, I cannot help thinking that common-sense had quite as much to do with the matter as poetical consistency. To be visible from the Devil's seat, it was necessary that the object, if small, should be *white*: and there is nothing like your human skull for retaining and even increasing its whiteness under exposure to all vicissitudes of weather."

"But your grandiloquence, and your conduct in swinging the beetle — how excessively odd! I was sure you were mad. And why did you insist on letting fall the bug, instead of a bullet, from the skull?"

"Why, to be frank, I felt somewhat annoyed by your evident suspicions touching my sanity, and so resolved to punish you quietly, in my own way, by a little bit of sober mystification. For this reason I swung the beetle, and for this reason I let it fall from the tree. An observation of yours about its great weight suggested the latter idea."

"Yes, I perceive; and now there is only one point which puzzles me. What are we to make of the skeletons found in the hole?"

"That is a question I am no more able to answer

¹ Poe evidently meant this word to be the singular of "insignia," and to refer either to the flag or to the skull upon it; but his Latin was faulty, as the singular of "insignia" is the neuter form "insigne."

than yourself. There seems, however, only one plausible way of accounting for them — and yet it is dreadful to believe in such atrocity as my suggestion would imply. It is clear that Kidd — if Kidd indeed secreted this treasure, which I doubt not — it is clear that he must have had assistance in the labor. But this labor concluded, he may have thought it expedient to remove all participants in his secret. Perhaps a couple of blows with a mattock were sufficient, while his coadjutors were busy in the pit; perhaps it required a dozen — who shall tell?"

THE PURLOINED LETTER.¹

Nil sapientiæ odiosius acumine nimio.

SENECA.²

AT Paris, just after dark one gusty evening in the autumn of 18—, I was enjoying the twofold luxury of meditation and a meerschaum, in company with my friend C. Auguste Dupin, in his little back library, or

¹ *The Purloined Letter* was first published in *The Gift* for 1845. It is not the most exciting of the detective stories, but is the most subtly ratiocinative of them all. It has none of the uncanniness of *The Murders in the Rue Morgue*, none of the tediousness of *The Mystery of Marie Rogêt*, none of the exaggerations of *Thou art the Man*, while it is quite distinct in many ways from *The Gold-Bug*, which is primarily a story of adventure with a *motif* of mystery to be unravelled. The student will note that the Sherlock Holmes of Dr. Conan Doyle finds his prototype in the Dupin of Poe's three stories, and that the celebrated French dramatist Sardou seems to have used *The Purloined Letter* as the basis of his well known play *Pattes de Mouche*, which is known in English as *A Scrap of Paper*.

² "Nothing is more odious to wisdom than too great acumen." L. Annæus Seneca (died 65 A. D.) was a celebrated philosopher and tutor to the Emperor Nero.

book closet, *au troisième*,¹ No. 33 Rue Dunôt, Faubourg St. Germain. For one hour at least we had maintained a profound silence; while each, to any casual observer, might have seemed intently and exclusively occupied with the curling eddies of smoke that oppressed the atmosphere of the chamber. For myself, however, I was mentally discussing certain topics which had formed matter for conversation between us at an earlier period of the evening; I mean the affair of the Rue Morgue, and the mystery attending the murder of Marie Rogêt. I looked upon it, therefore, as something of a coincidence, when the door of our apartment was thrown open and admitted our old acquaintance, Monsieur G——, the Prefect of the Parisian police.²

We gave him a hearty welcome; for there was nearly half as much of the entertaining as of the contemptible about the man, and we had not seen him for several years. We had been sitting in the dark, and Dupin now arose for the purpose of lighting a lamp, but sat down again, without doing so, upon G——'s saying that he had called to consult us, or rather to ask the opinion of my friend, about some official business which had occasioned a great deal of trouble.

"If it is any point requiring reflection," observed Dupin, as he forbore to enkindle the wick, "we shall examine it to better purpose in the dark."

¹ That is, "on the third (story)," which is equivalent to saying that Dupin lived at the top of four flights of stairs, since the French *étages* begin after the *rez-de-chaussée* (ground-floor) and the *entresol* have been passed. The district in which he resided (Faubourg St. Germain), on the left side of the Seine, is distinctly aristocratic.

² Dupin is described in *The Murders in the Rue Morgue*, Monsieur G—— in *The Mystery of Marie Rogêt*.

"That is another of your odd notions," said the Prefect, who had a fashion of calling everything "odd" that was beyond his comprehension, and thus lived amid an absolute legion of "oddities."

"Very true," said Dupin, as he supplied his visitor with a pipe, and rolled towards him a comfortable chair.

"And what is the difficulty now?" I asked. "Nothing more in the assassination way, I hope?"

"Oh, no; nothing of that nature. The fact is, the business is *very* simple indeed, and I make no doubt that we can manage it sufficiently well ourselves; but then I thought Dupin would like to hear the details of it, because it is so excessively *odd*."

"Simple and odd," said Dupin.

"Why, yes; and not exactly that, either. The fact is, we have all been a good deal puzzled because the affair is so simple, and yet baffles us altogether."

"Perhaps it is the very simplicity of the thing which puts you at fault," said my friend.

"What nonsense you *do* talk!" replied the Prefect, laughing heartily.

"Perhaps the mystery is a little *too* plain," said Dupin.

"Oh, good Heavens! who ever heard of such an idea?"

"A little *too* self-evident."

"Ha! ha! ha! ha! ha! ha! ho! ho! ho!" roared our visitor, profoundly amused. "O Dupin, you will be the death of me yet!"

"And what after all is the matter on hand?" I asked.

"Why, I will tell you," replied the Prefect, as he gave a long, steady, and contemplative puff, and set

tled himself in his chair. "I will tell you in a few words; but, before I begin, let me caution you that this is an affair demanding the greatest secrecy, and that I should most probably lose the position I now hold were it known that I confided it to any one."

"Proceed," said I.

"Or not," said Dupin.

"Well, then; I have received personal information from a very high quarter that a certain document of the last importance has been purloined from the royal apartments. The individual who purloined it is known; this beyond a doubt; he was seen to take it. It is known, also, that it still remains in his possession."

"How is this known?" asked Dupin.

"It is clearly inferred," replied the Prefect, "from the nature of the document, and from the non-appearance of certain results which would at once arise from its passing *out* of the robber's possession; that is to say, from his employing it as he must design in the end to employ it."

"Be a little more explicit," I said.

"Well, I may venture so far as to say that the paper gives its holder a certain power in a certain quarter where such power is immensely valuable." The Prefect was fond of the cant of diplomacy.

"Still I do not quite understand," said Dupin.

"No? well; the disclosure of the document to a third person, who shall be nameless, would bring in question the honor of a personage of most exalted station; and this fact gives the holder of the document an ascendancy over the illustrious personage whose honor and peace are so jeopardized."

"But this ascendancy," I interposed, "would

depend upon the robber's knowledge of the loser's knowledge of the robber. Who would dare" —

"The thief," said G——, "is the Minister D——, who dares all things, those unbecoming as well as those becoming a man. The method of the theft was not less ingenious than bold. The document in question — a letter, to be frank — had been received by the personage robbed while alone in the royal *boudoir*. During its perusal she was suddenly interrupted by the entrance of the other exalted personage, from whom especially it was her wish to conceal it. After a hurried and vain endeavor to thrust it in a drawer, she was forced to place it, open as it was, upon a table. The address, however, was uppermost, and, the contents thus exposed, the letter escaped notice. At this juncture enters the Minister D——. His lynx eye immediately perceives the paper, recognizes the handwriting of the address, observes the confusion of the personage addressed, and fathoms her secret. After some business transactions, hurried through in his ordinary manner, he produces a letter somewhat similar to the one in question, opens it, pretends to read it, and then places it in close juxtaposition to the other. Again he converses for some fifteen minutes upon the public affairs. At length in taking leave he takes also from the table the letter to which he had no claim. Its rightful owner saw, but of course dared not call attention to the act, in the presence of the third personage, who stood at her elbow. The minister decamped, leaving his own letter — one of no importance — upon the table."

"Here, then," said Dupin to me, "you have precisely what you demand to make the ascendancy complete, — the robber's knowledge of the loser's knowledge of the robber."

"Yes," replied the Prefect; "and the power thus attained has, for some months past, been wielded, for political purposes, to a very dangerous extent. The personage robbed is more thoroughly convinced, every day, of the necessity of reclaiming her letter. But this, of course, cannot be done openly. In fine, driven to despair, she has committed the matter to me."

"Than whom," said Dupin, amid a perfect whirlwind of smoke, "no more sagacious agent could, I suppose, be desired, or even imagined."

"You flatter me," replied the Prefect; "but it is possible that some such opinion may have been entertained."

"It is clear," said I, "as you observe, that the letter is still in possession of the minister; since it is this possession, and not any employment of the letter, which bestows the power. With the employment the power departs."

"True," said G——; "and upon this conviction I proceeded. My first care was to make thorough search of the minister's hotel; and here my chief embarrassment lay in the necessity of searching without his knowledge. Beyond all things, I have been warned of the danger which would result from giving him reason to suspect our design."

"But," said I, "you are quite *au fait*¹ in these investigations. The Parisian police have done this thing often before."

"Oh, yes; and for this reason I did not despair. The habits of the minister gave me, too, a great advantage. He is frequently absent from home all night. His servants are by no means numerous.

¹ Literally, "to the point" or "fact." Here it is about equivalent to our idiom "at home in," *i. e.* expert in.

They sleep at a distance from their master's apartment, and, being chiefly Neapolitans, are readily made drunk. I have keys, as you know, with which I can open any chamber or cabinet in Paris. For three months a night has not passed, during the greater part of which I have not been engaged, personally, in ransacking the D—— Hotel. My honor is interested, and, to mention a great secret, the reward is enormous. So I did not abandon the search until I had become fully satisfied the thief is a more astute man than myself. I fancy that I have investigated every nook and corner of the premises in which it is possible that the paper can be concealed."

"But is it not possible," I suggested, "that although the letter may be in possession of the minister, as it unquestionably is, he may have concealed it elsewhere than upon his own premises?"

"This is barely possible," said Dupin. "The present peculiar condition of affairs at court, and especially of those intrigues in which D—— is known to be involved, would render the instant availability of the document — its susceptibility of being produced at a moment's notice — a point of nearly equal importance with its possession."

"Its susceptibility of being produced?" said I.

"That is to say, of being *destroyed*," said Dupin.

"True," I observed; "the paper is clearly then upon the premises. As for its being upon the person of the minister, we may consider that as out of the question."

"Entirely," said the Prefect. "He has been twice waylaid, as if by footpads, and his person rigorously searched under my own inspection."

"You might have spared yourself the trouble,"

said Dupin. "D——, I presume, is not altogether a fool, and, if not, must have anticipated these waylayings as a matter of course."

"Not *altogether* a fool," said G——; "but then he's a poet, which I take to be only one remove from a fool."

"True," said Dupin, after a long and thoughtful whiff from his meerschaum, "although I have been guilty of certain doggerel myself."

"Suppose you detail," said I, "the particulars of your search."

"Why, the fact is, we took our time, and we searched *everywhere*. I have had long experience in these affairs. I took the entire building, room by room, devoting the nights of a whole week to each. We examined, first, the furniture of each apartment. We opened every possible drawer; and I presume you know that, to a properly trained police agent, such a thing as a *secret* drawer is impossible. Any man is a dolt who permits a 'secret' drawer to escape him in a search of this kind. The thing is *so* plain. There is a certain amount of bulk — of space — to be accounted for in every cabinet. Then we have accurate rules. The fiftieth part of a line could not escape us. After the cabinets we took the chairs. The cushions we probed with the fine long needles you have seen me employ. From the tables we removed the tops."

"Why so?"

"Sometimes the top of a table, or other similarly arranged piece of furniture, is removed by the person wishing to conceal an article; then the leg is excavated, the article deposited within the cavity, and the top replaced. The bottoms and tops of bed-posts are employed in the same way."

“But could not the cavity be detected by sounding?” I asked.

“By no means, if, when the article is deposited, a sufficient wadding of cotton be placed around it. Besides, in our case we were obliged to proceed without noise.”

“But you could not have removed — you could not have taken to pieces *all* articles of furniture in which it would have been possible to make a deposit in the manner you mention. A letter may be compressed in a thin spiral roll, not differing much in shape or bulk from a large knitting-needle, and in this form it might be inserted into the rung of a chair, for example. You did not take to pieces all the chairs!”

“Certainly not; but we did better — we examined the rungs of every chair in the hotel, and indeed, the jointings of every description of furniture, by the aid of a most powerful microscope. Had there been any traces of recent disturbance we should not have failed to detect it instantly. A single grain of gimlet-dust, for example, would have been as obvious as an apple. Any disorder in the gluing — any unusual gaping in the joints — would have sufficed to insure detection.”

“I presume you looked to the mirrors, between the boards and the plates, and you probed the beds and the bedclothes, as well as the curtains and carpets?”

“That, of course; and when we had absolutely completed every article of the furniture in this way, then we examined the house itself. We divided its entire surface into compartments, which we numbered, so that none might be missed; then we scrutinized each individual square inch throughout the premises, including the two houses immediately adjoining, with the microscope, as before.”

"The two houses adjoining!" I exclaimed; "you must have had a great deal of trouble."

"We had; but the reward offered is prodigious."

"You include the *grounds* about the houses?"

"All the grounds are paved with bricks. They gave us comparatively little trouble. We examined the moss between the bricks, and found it undisturbed."

"You looked among D——'s papers, of course, and into the books of the library?"

"Certainly; we opened every package and parcel; we not only opened every book, but we turned over every leaf in each volume, not contenting ourselves with a mere shake, according to the fashion of some of our police officers. We also measured the thickness of every book-cover, with the most accurate admeasurement, and applied to each the most jealous scrutiny of the microscope. Had any of the bindings been recently meddled with, it would have been utterly impossible that the fact should have escaped observation. Some five or six volumes, just from the hands of the binder, we carefully probed, longitudinally, with the needles."

"You explored the floors beneath the carpets?"

"Beyond doubt. We removed every carpet, and examined the boards with the microscope."

"And the paper on the walls?"

"Yes."

"You looked into the cellars?"

"We did."

"Then," I said, "you have been making a miscalculation, and the letter is *not* on the premises, as you suppose."

"I fear you are right there," said the Prefect.

“And now, Dupin, what would you advise me to do?”

“To make a thorough re-search of the premises.”

“That is absolutely needless,” replied G——. “I am not more sure that I breathe than I am that the letter is not at the Hotel.”

“I have no better advice to give you,” said Dupin. “You have, of course, an accurate description of the letter?”

“Oh, yes.” And here the Prefect, producing a memorandum-book, proceeded to read aloud a minute account of the internal, and especially of the external appearance of the missing document. Soon after finishing the perusal of this description, he took his departure, more entirely depressed in spirits than I had ever known the good gentleman before.

In about a month afterward he paid us another visit, and found us occupied very nearly as before. He took a pipe and a chair, and entered into some ordinary conversation. At length I said:—

“Well, but G——, what of the purloined letter? I presume you have at last made up your mind that there is no such thing as overreaching the minister?”

“Confound him, say I—yes; I made the reëxamination, however, as Dupin suggested—but it was all labor lost, as I knew it would be.”

“How much was the reward offered, did you say?” asked Dupin.

“Why, a very great deal—a *very* liberal reward—I don’t like to say how much precisely; but one thing I *will* say, that I would n’t mind giving my individual check for fifty thousand francs to any one who could obtain me that letter. The fact is, it is becoming of **more** and more importance every day; and the re-

ward has been lately doubled. If it were trebled, however, I could do no more than I have done."

"Why, yes," said Dupin drawlingly, between the whiffs of his meerschaum, "I really — think, G——, you have not exerted yourself — to the utmost in this matter. You might — do a little more, I think, eh?"

"How? in what way?"

"Why (puff, puff), you might (puff, puff) employ counsel in the matter, eh (puff, puff, puff)? Do you remember the story they tell of Abernethy?"¹

"No; hang Abernethy!"

"To be sure! hang him and welcome. But once upon a time, a certain rich miser conceived the design of sponging upon this Abernethy for a medical opinion. Getting up, for this purpose, an ordinary conversation in a private company, he insinuated his case to the physician, as that of an imaginary individual.

"‘We will suppose,’ said the miser, ‘that his symptoms are such and such; now, doctor, what would *you* have directed him to take?’

"‘Take!’ said Abernethy, ‘why, take *advice*, to be sure.’"

"But," said the Prefect, a little discomposed, "I am *perfectly* willing to take advice, and to pay for it. I would *really* give fifty thousand francs to any one who would aid me in the matter."

"In that case," replied Dupin, opening a drawer, and producing a check-book, "you may as well fill me up a check for the amount mentioned. When you have signed it, I will hand you the letter."

¹ John Abernethy (1764–1831) the celebrated English surgeon. He was noted for his brusqueness of manner with his patients. Another good story is told of him in the recent *Life of Lord Tennyson* by his son (ii. 35, 36).

I was astounded. The Prefect appeared absolutely thunderstricken. For some minutes he remained speechless and motionless, looking incredulously at my friend with open mouth, and eyes that seemed starting from their sockets; then, apparently recovering himself in some measure, he seized a pen, and after several pauses and vacant stares, finally filled up and signed a check for fifty thousand francs, and handed it across the table to Dupin. The latter examined it carefully and deposited it in his pocketbook; then, unlocking an *escritoire*,¹ took thence a letter and gave it to the Prefect. This functionary grasped it in a perfect agony of joy, opened it with a trembling hand, cast a rapid glance at its contents, and then, scrambling and struggling to the door, rushed at length unceremoniously from the room and from the house, without having uttered a syllable since Dupin had requested him to fill up the check.

When he had gone, my friend entered into some explanations.

“The Parisian police,” he said, “are exceedingly able in their way. They are persevering, ingenious, cunning, and thoroughly versed in the knowledge which their duties seem chiefly to demand. Thus, when G—— detailed to us his mode of searching the premises at the Hotel D——, I felt entire confidence in his having made a satisfactory investigation — so far as his labors extended.”

“So far as his labors extended?” said I.

“Yes,” said Dupin. “The measures adopted were not only the best of their kind, but carried out to absolute perfection. Had the letter been deposited within the range of their search, these fellows would, beyond a question, have found it.”

¹ That is, a writing-desk.

I merely laughed — but he seemed quite serious in all that he said.

“The measures, then,” he continued, “were good in their kind, and well executed ; their defect lay in their being inapplicable to the case, and to the man. A certain set of highly ingenious resources are, with the Prefect, a sort of Procrustean¹ bed to which he forcibly adapts his designs. But he perpetually errs by being too deep or too shallow, for the matter in hand ; and many a schoolboy is a better reasoner than he. I knew one about eight years of age, whose success at guessing in the game of ‘even and odd’ attracted universal admiration. This game is simple, and is played with marbles. One player holds in his hand a number of these toys, and demands of another whether that number is even or odd. If the guess is right, the guesser wins one ; if wrong, he loses one. The boy to whom I allude won all the marbles of the school. Of course he had some principle of guessing ; and this lay in mere observation and admeasurement of the astuteness of his opponents. For example an arrant simpleton is his opponent, and, holding up his closed hand asks, ‘Are they even or odd?’ Our schoolboy replies, ‘Odd,’ and loses ; but upon the second trial he wins, for he then says to himself, ‘The simpleton had them even upon the first trial, and his amount of cunning is just sufficient to make him have them odd upon the second ; I will therefore guess odd ;’ he guesses odd, and wins. Now, with a simpleton a degree above the first he would have

¹ The adjective is formed from Procrustes, the name of a famous robber of Attica, who would tie his victims to a bed and cut them to fit it if they were too long, or stretch them if they were too short.

reasoned thus: 'This fellow finds that in the first instance I guessed odd, and in the second he will propose to himself, upon the first impulse, a simple variation from even to odd, as did the first simpleton; but then a second thought will suggest that this is too simple a variation, and finally he will decide upon putting it even as before. I will therefore guess even;' he guesses even, and wins. Now this mode of reasoning in the schoolboy, whom his fellows term 'lucky' — what, in its last analysis, is it?"

"It is merely," I said, "an identification of the reasoner's intellect with that of his opponent."

"It is," said Dupin; "and, upon inquiring of the boy by what means he effected the *thorough* identification in which his success consisted, I received answer as follows: 'When I wish to find out how wise, or how stupid, or how good, or how wicked is any one or what are his thoughts at the moment, I fashion the expression of my face, as accurately as possible, in accordance with the expression of his, and then wait to see what thoughts or sentiments arise in my mind or heart, as if to match or correspond with the expression.' This response of the schoolboy lies at the bottom of all the spurious profundity which has been attributed to Rochefoucauld, to La Bruyère, to Machiavelli, and to Campanella."¹

"And the identification," I said, "of the reasoner's intellect with that of his opponents, depends, if I understand you aright, upon the accuracy with which the opponent's intellect is admeasured."

¹ François, Duke de la Rochefoucauld (1613-80) and Jean de la Bruyère (1645-96) were famous French moralists; Nicolo Machiavelli (1469-1527) was a great Florentine statesman and writer; Tommaso Campanella (1568-1639) was a celebrated Italian philosopher.

“For its practical value it depends upon this,” replied Dupin, “and the Prefect and his cohort fail so frequently, first, by default of this identification, and secondly, by ill-admeasurement, or rather through non-admeasurement, of the intellect with which they are engaged. They consider only their *own* ideas of ingenuity; and, in searching for anything hidden, advert only to the modes in which *they* would have hidden it. They are right in this much, — that their own ingenuity is a faithful representative of that of *the mass*; but when the cunning of the individual felon is diverse in character from their own, the felon foils them, of course. This always happens when it is above their own, and very usually when it is below. They have no variation of principle in their investigations; at best, when urged by some unusual emergency, by some extraordinary reward, they extend or exaggerate their old modes of *practice*, without touching their principles. What, for example, in this case of D——, has been done to vary the principle of action? What is all this boring, and probing, and sounding, and scrutinizing with the microscope, and dividing the surface of the building into registered square inches — what is it all but an exaggeration *of the application* of the one principle or set of principles of search, which are based upon the one set of notions regarding human ingenuity, to which the Prefect, in the long routine of his duty, has been accustomed? Do you not see he has taken it for granted that *all* men proceed to conceal a letter — not exactly in a gimlet-hole bored in a chair leg — but, at least, in *some* out of the way hole or corner suggested by the same tenor of thought which would urge a man to secrete a letter in a gimlet-hole bored in a chair leg? And do you not

see, also, that such *recherchés*¹ nooks for concealment are adapted only for ordinary occasions and would be adopted only by ordinary intellects? for, in all cases of concealment, a disposal of the article concealed — a disposal of it in this *recherché* manner — is, in the very first instance, presumable and presumed; and thus its discovery depends, not at all upon the acumen, but altogether upon the mere care, patience, and determination of the seekers; and where the case is of importance — or, what amounts to the same thing in policial² eyes, when the reward is of magnitude — the qualities in question have *never* been known to fail. You will now understand what I meant in suggesting that, had the purloined letter been hidden anywhere within the limits of the Prefect's examination — in other words, had the principle of its concealment been comprehended within the principles of the Prefect, its discovery would have been a matter altogether beyond question. This functionary, however, has been thoroughly mystified; and the remote source of his defeat lies in the supposition that the minister is a fool because he has acquired renown as a poet. All fools are poets; this the Prefect *feels*; and he is merely guilty of a *non distributio medii*³ in thence inferring that all poets are fools."

"But is this really the poet?" I asked. "There are two brothers, I know; and both have attained reputation in letters. The minister, I believe, has written learnedly on the Differential Calculus. He is a mathematician and no poet."

¹ That is, sought out with care.

² A rare word.

³ The fallacy known in logic as that of "the undistributed middle." See *Century Dictionary*, sub "fallacy."

“You are mistaken; I know him well; he is both. As poet *and* mathematician he would reason well; as mere mathematician he could not have reasoned at all, and thus would have been at the mercy of the Prefect.”

“You surprise me,” I said, “by these opinions, which have been contradicted by the voice of the world. You do not mean to set at naught the well-digested idea of centuries. The mathematical reason has long been regarded as *the reason par excellence*.”¹

“‘*Il y a à parier,*’” replied Dupin, quoting from Chamfort, “‘*que toute idée publique, toute convention reçue, est une sottise, car elle a convenu au plus grand nombre.*’”² The mathematicians, I grant you, have done their best to promulgate the popular error to which you allude, and which is none the less an error for its promulgation as truth. With an art worthy a better cause, for example, they have insinuated the term ‘analysis’ into application to algebra. The French are the originators of this practical deception; but if a term is of any importance — if words derive any value from applicability — then ‘analysis’ conveys “algebra,” about as much as, in Latin, ‘*ambitus*’ implies ‘ambition,’ ‘*religio*,’ ‘religion,’ or ‘*homines honesti*,’ a set of *honorable* men.”³

“You have a quarrel on hand, I see,” said I, “with some of the algebraists of Paris; but proceed.”

¹ Literally “by excellence,” that is, the chief or preëminent.

² “It is safe to wager that every idea which is public property, every received convention, is a bit of stupidity, for it has suited the majority.” Poe quotes this again in his *Marginalia*. Nicolas Chamfort (1741–94) was one of the most interesting Frenchmen of his time and a noted writer of maxims.

³ The words probably mean normally, unlawful striving after public office; conscientiousness; and distinguished men.

“I dispute the availability, and thus the value of that reason which is cultivated in any special form other than the abstractly logical. I dispute, in particular, the reason educed by mathematical study. The mathematics are the science of form and quantity; mathematical reasoning is merely logic applied to observation upon form and quantity. The great error lies in supposing that even the truths of what is called *pure algebra* are abstract or general truths. And this error is so egregious that I am confounded at the universality with which it has been received. Mathematical axioms are *not* axioms of general truth. What is true of *relation* — of form and quantity — is often grossly false in regard to morals, for example. In this latter science it is very usually *untrue* that the aggregated parts are equal to the whole. In chemistry, also, the axiom fails. In the consideration of motive it fails; for two motives, each of a given value, have not, necessarily, a value when united equal to the sum of their values apart. There are numerous other mathematical truths which are only truths within the limits of *relation*. But the mathematician argues, from his *finite truths*, through habit, as if they were of an absolutely general applicability — as the world indeed imagines them to be. Bryant,¹ in his very learned ‘*Mythology*,’ mentions an analogous source of error, when he says that ‘although the Pagan fables are not believed, yet we forget ourselves continually, and make inferences from them as existing realities.’ With the algebraists, however, who are Pagans themselves, the ‘Pagan fables’ *are* believed and the in-

¹ Jacob Bryant (1715–1804), an English writer on theological and mythological subjects. The treatise named is probably as worthless as Dupin’s statements are exaggerated.

ferences are made, not so much through lapse of memory as through an unaccountable addling of the brains. In short I never yet encountered the mere mathematician who could be trusted out of equal roots, or one who did not clandestinely hold it as a point of his faith that $x^2 + px$ was absolutely and unconditionally equal to q . Say to one of these gentlemen, by way of experiment, if you please, that you believe occasions may occur where $x^2 + px$ is *not* altogether equal to q , and, having made him understand what you mean, get out of his reach as speedily as convenient, for, beyond doubt, he will endeavor to knock you down.

“I mean to say,” continued Dupin, while I merely laughed at his last observations, “that if the minister had been no more than a mathematician the Prefect would have been under no necessity of giving me this check. I knew him, however, as both mathematician and poet, and my measures were adapted to his capacity with reference to the circumstances by which he was surrounded. I knew him as courtier, too, and as a bold *intrigant*.¹ Such a man, I considered, could not fail to be aware of the ordinary policial modes of action. He could not have failed to anticipate — and events have proved that he did not fail to anticipate — the waylayings to which he was subjected. He must have foreseen, I reflected, the secret investigations of his premises. His frequent absences from home at night, which were hailed by the Prefect as certain aids to his success, I regarded only as ruses, to afford opportunity for thorough search to the police, and thus the sooner to impress them with the conviction to² which G——, in fact, did finally arrive, — the conviction that the letter was not upon the premises. I

¹ Intriguer.

² Should not this be “at”?

felt, also, that the whole train of thought, which I was at some pains in detailing to you just now, concerning the invariable principle of policial action in searches for articles concealed — I felt that this whole train of thought would necessarily pass through the mind of the minister. It would imperatively lead him to despise all the ordinary *nooks* of concealment. *He* could not, I reflected, be so weak as not to see that the most intricate and remote recess of his hotel would be as open as his commonest closets to the eyes, to the probes, to the gimlets, and to the microscopes of the Prefect. I saw, in fine, that he would be driven, as a matter of course, to *simplicity*, if not deliberately induced to it as a matter of choice. You will remember, perhaps, how desperately the Prefect laughed when I suggested, upon our first interview, that it was just possible this mystery troubled him so much on account of its being so *very* self-evident.”

“Yes,” said I, “I remember his merriment well. I really thought he would have fallen into convulsions.”

“The material world,” continued Dupin, “abounds with very strict analogies to the immaterial; and thus some color of truth has been given to the rhetorical dogma, that metaphor, or simile, may be made to strengthen an argument, as well as to embellish a description. The principle of the *vis inertiae*,¹ for example, seems to be identical in physics and metaphysics. It is not more true in the former, that a large body is with more difficulty set in motion than a smaller one, and that its subsequent momentum is commensurate with this difficulty, than it is, in the

¹ Literally “force of inertia,” — sufficiently described in the text.

latter, that intellects of the vaster capacity, while more forcible, more constant, and more eventful in their movements than those of inferior grade, are yet the less readily moved, and more embarrassed and full of hesitation in the first few steps of their progress. Again: have you ever noticed which of the street signs over the shop doors are the most attractive of attention?"

"I have never given the matter a thought," I said.

"There is a game of puzzles," he resumed, "which is played upon a map. One party playing requires another to find a given word, — the name of town, river, state, or empire, — any word, in short, upon the motley and perplexed surface of the chart. A novice in the game generally seeks to embarrass his opponents by giving them the most minutely lettered names; but the adept selects such words as stretch in large characters, from one end of the chart to the other. These, like the over-largely lettered signs and placards of the street, escape observation by dint of being excessively obvious; and here the physical oversight is precisely analogous with the moral inapprehension by which the intellect suffers to pass unnoticed those considerations which are too obtrusively and too palpably self-evident. But this is a point, it appears, somewhat above or beneath the understanding of the Prefect. He never once thought it probable, or possible, that the minister had deposited the letter immediately beneath the nose of the whole world, by way of best preventing any portion of that world from perceiving it.

"But the more I reflected upon the daring, dashing, and discriminating ingenuity of D——; upon the fact that the document must always have been *at hand*, if

he intended to use it to good purpose ; and upon the decisive evidence, obtained by the Prefect, that it was not hidden within the limits of that dignitary's ordinary search — the more satisfied I became that, to conceal this letter, the minister had resorted to the comprehensive and sagacious expedient of not attempting to conceal it at all.

“ Full of these ideas, I prepared myself with a pair of green spectacles, and called one fine morning, quite by accident, at the ministerial hotel. I found D—— at home, yawning, lounging, and dawdling, as usual, and pretending to be in the last extremity of *ennui*. He is, perhaps, the most really energetic human being now alive — but that is only when nobody sees him.

“ To be even with him, I complained of my weak eyes, and lamented the necessity of the spectacles, under cover of which I cautiously and thoroughly surveyed the whole apartment, while seemingly intent only upon the conversation of my host.

“ I paid especial attention to a large writing-table near which he sat, and upon which lay confusedly some miscellaneous letters and other papers, with one or two musical instruments and a few books. Here, however, after a long and very deliberate scrutiny, I saw nothing to excite particular suspicion.

“ At length my eyes, in going the circuit of the room, fell upon a trumpery filigree card-rack of paste-board, that hung dangling, by a dirty blue ribbon, from a little brass knob just beneath the middle of the mantelpiece. In this rack, which had three or four compartments, were five or six visiting cards and a solitary letter. This last was much soiled and crumpled. It was torn nearly in two, across the middle — as if a design, in the first instance, to tear it

entirely up as worthless had been altered, or stayed, in the second. It had a large black seal, bearing the D—— cipher *very* conspicuously, and was addressed, in a diminutive female hand, to D——, the minister himself. It was thrust carelessly, and even, as it seemed, contemptuously, into one of the uppermost divisions of the rack.

“No sooner had I glanced at this letter than I concluded it to be that of which I was in search. To be sure, it was, to all appearance, radically different from the one of which the Prefect had read us so minute a description. Here the seal was large and black, with the D—— cipher; there it was small and red, with the ducal arms of the S—— family. Here, the address, to the minister, was diminutive and feminine; there, the superscription, to a certain royal personage, was markedly bold and decided; the *size* alone formed a point of correspondence. But, then, the *radicalness* of these differences, which was excessive; the dirt, the soiled and torn condition of the paper, so inconsistent with the *true* methodical habits of D——, and so suggestive of a design to delude the beholder into an idea of the worthlessness of the document; these things, together with the hyper-obtrusive situation of this document, full in the view of every visitor, and thus exactly in accordance with the conclusions to which I had previously arrived; these things, I say, were strongly corroborative of suspicion, in one who came with the intention to suspect.

“I protracted my visit as long as possible, and while I maintained a most animated discussion with the minister, upon a topic which I knew well had never failed to interest and excite him, I kept my attention really riveted upon the letter. In this examination, I

committed to memory its external appearance and arrangement in the rack ; and also fell, at length, upon a discovery which set at rest whatever trivial doubt I might have entertained. In scrutinizing the edges of the paper, I observed them to be more *chafed* than seemed necessary. They presented the *broken* appearance which is manifested when a stiff paper, having been once folded and pressed with a folder, is refolded in a reversed direction, in the same creases or edges which had formed the original fold. This discovery was sufficient. It was clear to me that the letter had been turned, as a glove, inside out, re-directed, and re-sealed. I bade the minister good-morning, and took my departure at once, leaving a gold snuff-box upon the table.

“ The next morning I called for the snuff-box, when we resumed, quite eagerly, the conversation of the preceding day. While thus engaged, however, a loud report, as if of a pistol, was heard immediately beneath the windows of the hotel, and was succeeded by a series of fearful screams, and the shoutings of a mob. D—— rushed to a casement, threw it open, and looked out. In the meantime, I stepped to the card-rack, took the letter, put it in my pocket, and replaced it by a *facsimile* (so far as regards externals) which I had carefully prepared at my lodgings — imitating the D—— cipher very readily by means of a seal formed of bread.

“ The disturbance in the street had been occasioned by the frantic behavior of a man with a musket. He had fired it among a crowd of women and children. It proved, however, to have been without ball, and the fellow was suffered to go his way as a lunatic or a drunkard. When he had gone, D—— came from the

window, whither I had followed him immediately upon securing the object in view. Soon afterwards I bade him farewell. The pretended lunatic was a man in my own pay."

"But what purpose had you," I asked, "in replacing the letter by a *facsimile*? Would it not have been better, at the first visit, to have seized it openly and departed?"

"D——," replied Dupin, "is a desperate man, and a man of nerve. His hotel, too, is not without attendants devoted to his interest. Had I made the wild attempt you suggest, I might never have left the ministerial presence alive. The good people of Paris might have heard of me no more. But I had an object apart from these considerations. You know my political prepossessions. In this matter I act as a partisan of the lady concerned. For eighteen months the minister has had her in his power. She has now him in hers — since, being unaware that the letter is not in his possession, he will proceed with his exactions as if it was. Thus will he inevitably commit himself at once to his political destruction. His downfall, too, will not be more precipitate than awkward. It is all very well to talk about the *facilis descensus Averni*;¹ but in all kinds of climbing, as Catalani² said of singing, it is far more easy to get up than to come down. In the present instance I have no sympathy — at least no pity — for him who descends. He is that *monstrum horrendum*,³ an unprincipled man of genius. I con-

¹ "Facilis est descensus Averni" is a famous Latin saying borrowed from the Greek, meaning, "The descent to Avernus (hell) is easy." Virgil (*Æneid* vi. 126) has "*facilis descensus Averno*."

² Angelica Catalani (1785–1849) the celebrated Italian singer.

³ The whole quotation runs, "*Monstrum horrendum, informe, ingens, cui lumen ademptum*." (A monster to be shuddered at,

fess, however, that I should like very well to know the precise character of his thoughts, when, being defied by her whom the Prefect terms ‘a certain personage,’ he is reduced to opening the letter which I left for him in the card-rack.”

“How? Did you put anything particular in it?”

“Why, it did not seem altogether right to leave the interior blank — that would have been insulting. D——, at Vienna once, did me an evil turn, which I told him, quite good-humoredly, I should remember. So, as I knew he would feel some curiosity in regard to the identity of the person who had outwitted him, I thought it a pity not to give him a clew. He is well acquainted with my MS., and I just copied into the middle of the blank sheet the words: —

‘—— Un dessein si funeste,

S’il n’est digne d’Atrée, est digne de Thyeste.’¹

They are to be found in Crébillon’s ‘Atrée.’”

THE TELL-TALE HEART.²

TRUE! — nervous — very, very dreadfully nervous I had been and am; but why *will* you say that I am mad? The disease had sharpened my senses — not misshapen, huge, deprived of sight.) It is a hexameter from Virgil descriptive of the Cyclops (*Æneid*, iii. 658).

¹ “So baleful a design, if it is not worthy of Atreus, is worthy of Thyestes.” The lines occur in the fourth scene of the fifth act of *Atrée et Thyeste*, — a tragedy by P. J. de Crébillon (1674–1762), who was much in vogue during his long life. For the horrible story of the two brothers, see *Harper’s Classical Dictionary*.

² *The Tell-tale Heart* was first published in *The Pioneer* for January, 1843. Its rank among the *Tales of Conscience* is not so high as that of *The Black Cat*, but it is less gruesome and more succinct in its evolution, and as a tale of monomania has rarely been surpassed.

destroyed — not dulled them. Above all was the sense of hearing acute. I heard all things in the heaven and in the earth. I heard many things in hell. How, then, am I mad? Hearken! and observe how healthily — how calmly I can tell you the whole story.

It is impossible to say how first the idea entered my brain; but, once conceived, it haunted me day and night. Object there was none. Passion there was none. I loved the old man. He had never wronged me. He had never given me insult. For his gold I had no desire. I think it was his eye! yes, it was this! One of his eyes resembled that of a vulture, — a pale blue eye, with a film over it. Whenever it fell upon me, my blood ran cold; and so by degrees — very gradually — I made up my mind to take the life of the old man, and thus rid myself of the eye forever.

Now this is the point. You fancy me mad. Madmen know nothing. But you should have seen *me*. You should have seen how wisely I proceeded — with what caution — with what foresight — with what dissimulation I went to work! I was never kinder to the old man than during the whole week before I killed him. And every night, about midnight, I turned the latch of his door and opened it — oh, so gently! And then, when I had made an opening sufficient for my head, I put in a dark lantern, all closed, closed, so that no light shone out, and then I thrust in my head. Oh, you would have laughed to see how cunningly I thrust it in! I moved it slowly — very, very slowly, so that I might not disturb the old man's sleep. It took me an hour to place my whole head within the opening so far that I could see

him as he lay upon his bed. Ha! — would a madman have been so wise as this? And then, when my head was well in the room, I undid the lantern cautiously — oh, so cautiously — cautiously (for the hinges creaked) — I undid it just so much that a single thin ray fell upon the vulture eye. And this I did for seven long nights — every night just at midnight — but I found the eye always closed; and so it was impossible to do the work; for it was not the old man who vexed me, but his Evil Eye. And every morning, when the day broke, I went boldly into the chamber, and spoke courageously to him, calling him by name in a hearty tone, and inquiring how he had passed the night. So you see he would have been a very profound old man, indeed, to suspect that every night, just at twelve, I looked in upon him while he slept.

Upon the eighth night I was more than usually cautious in opening the door. A watch's minute-hand moves more quickly than did mine. Never before that night had I *felt* the extent of my own powers — of my sagacity. I could scarcely contain my feelings of triumph. To think that there I was, opening the door little by little, and he not even to dream of my secret deeds or thoughts! I fairly chuckled at the idea; and perhaps he heard me, for he moved on the bed suddenly, as if startled. Now you may think that I drew back — but no. His room was as black as pitch with the thick darkness (for the shutters were close fastened, through fear of robbers), and so I knew that he could not see the opening of the door, and I kept pushing it on steadily, steadily.

I had my head in, and was about to open the

lantern, when my thumb slipped upon the tin fastening, and the old man sprang up in the bed, crying out, "Who 's there?"

I kept quite still and said nothing. For a whole hour I did not move a muscle, and in the meantime I did not hear him lie down. He was still sitting up in the bed, listening, — just as I have done, night after night, hearkening to the death watches in the wall.¹

Presently I heard a slight groan, and I knew it was the groan of mortal terror. It was not a groan of pain or of grief, — oh, no! — it was the low, stifled sound that arises from the bottom of the soul when overcharged with awe. I knew the sound well. Many a night, just at midnight, when all the world slept, it has welled up from my own bosom, deepening, with its dreadful echo, the terrors that distracted me. I say I knew it well. I knew what the old man felt, and pitied him, although I chuckled at heart. I knew that he had been lying awake ever since the first slight noise, when he had turned in the bed. His fears had been ever since growing upon him. He had been trying to fancy them causeless, but could not. He had been saying to himself, "It is nothing but the wind in the chimney — it is only a mouse crossing the floor," or "it is merely a cricket which has made a single chirp." Yes, he had been trying to comfort himself with these suppositions;

¹ Certain small beetles bore into the woodwork of old houses, and there "make a clicking sound by standing up on their hind legs and knocking their heads against the wood quickly and forcibly several times in succession." (*Century Dictionary*.) Both the beetles and the noise they make are called "death watches," because superstitious people regard the sounds as ominous of death.

but he had found all in vain. *All in vain* ; because Death, in approaching him, had stalked with his black shadow before him, and enveloped the victim. And it was the mournful influence of the unperceived shadow that caused him to feel — although he neither saw nor heard — to *feel* the presence of my head within the room.

When I had waited a long time, very patiently, without hearing him lie down, I resolved to open a little — a very, very little crevice in the lantern. So I opened it—you cannot imagine how stealthily, stealthily — until at length a single dim ray, like the thread of the spider, shot from out the crevice and fell upon the vulture eye.

It was open, — wide, wide open, — and I grew furious as I gazed upon it. I saw it with perfect distinctness, — all a dull blue, with a hideous veil over it that chilled the very marrow in my bones ; but I could see nothing else of the old man's face or person ; for I had directed the ray, as if by instinct, precisely upon the damned spot.

And now have I not told you that what you mistake for madness is but over-acuteness of the senses ? — now, I say, there came to my ears *a low, dull, quick sound, much such a sound as a watch makes when enveloped in cotton*. I knew *that* sound well, too. It was the beating of the old man's heart. It increased my fury, as the beating of a drum stimulates the soldier into courage.

But even yet I refrained and kept still. I scarcely breathed, I held the lantern motionless. I tried how steadily I could maintain the ray upon the eye. Meantime the hellish tattoo of the heart increased. It grew quicker and quicker, and louder and louder,

every instant. The old man's terror *must* have been extreme! It grew louder, I say, louder every moment! — do you mark me well? I have told you that I am nervous; so I am. And now at the dead hour of the night, amid the dreadful silence of that old house, so strange a noise as this excited me to uncontrollable terror. Yet for some minutes longer I refrained and stood still. But the beating grew louder, louder! I thought the heart must burst. And now a new anxiety seized me, — the sound would be heard by a neighbor! The old man's hour had come! With a loud yell, I threw open the lantern and leaped into the room. He shrieked once, — once only. In an instant I dragged him to the floor, and pulled the heavy bed over him. I then smiled gayly to find the deed so far done. But, for many minutes, the heart beat on with a muffled sound. This, however, did not vex me; it would not be heard through the wall. At length it ceased. The old man was dead. I removed the bed and examined the corpse. Yes, he was stone, stone dead. I placed my hand upon the heart and held it there many minutes. There was no pulsation. He was stone dead. His eye would trouble me no more.

If still you think me mad, you will think so no longer when I describe the wise precautions I took for the concealment of the body. The night waned, and I worked hastily, but in silence. First of all I dismembered the corpse. I cut off the head and the arms and the legs.

I then took up three planks from the flooring of the chamber, and deposited all between the scantlings. I then replaced the boards so cleverly, so cunningly, that no human eye — not even *his* — could have de-

tected anything wrong. There was nothing to wash out, — no stain of any kind, — no blood-spot whatever. I had been too wary for that. A tub had caught all — ha ! ha !

When I had made an end of these labors, it was four o'clock, — still dark as midnight. As the bell sounded the hour, there came a knocking at the street door. I went down to open it with a light heart, — for what had I *now* to fear? There entered three men who introduced themselves, with perfect suavity, as officers of the police. A shriek had been heard by a neighbor during the night; suspicion of foul play had been aroused; information had been lodged at the police office, and they (the officers) had been deputed to search the premises.

I smiled — for what had I to fear? I bade the gentlemen welcome. The shriek, I said, was my own in a dream. The old man, I mentioned, was absent in the country. I took my visitors all over the house. I bade them search — search *well*. I led them, at length, to *his* chamber. I showed them his treasures, secure, undisturbed. In the enthusiasm of my confidence, I brought chairs into the room, and desired them *here* to rest from their fatigues, while I myself, in the wild audacity of my perfect triumph, placed my own seat upon the very spot beneath which reposed the corpse of the victim.¹

The officers were satisfied. My manner had convinced them. I was singularly at ease. They sat, and, while I answered cheerily, they chatted of familiar things. But, ere long, I felt myself getting pale, and wished them gone. My head ached, and I fancied a ringing in my ears; but still they sat and still

¹ Compare the close of *The Black Cat*.

chatted. The ringing became more distinct, — it continued and became more distinct, — I talked more freely to get rid of the feeling, but it continued and gained definitiveness, — until, at length, I found that the noise was *not* within my ears.

No doubt I now grew *very* pale; but I talked more fluently, and with a heightened voice. Yet the sound increased — and what could I do? It was a *low, dull, quick sound*, — *much such a sound as a watch makes when enveloped in cotton*. I gasped for breath — and yet the officers heard it not. I talked more quickly — more vehemently; but the noise steadily increased. I arose and argued about trifles, in a high key and with violent gesticulations; but the noise steadily increased. Why *would* they not be gone? I paced the floor to and fro with heavy strides, as if excited to fury by the observations of the men; but the noise steadily increased. O God! what *could* I do? I foamed — I raved — I swore! I swung the chair upon which I had been sitting, and grated it upon the boards, but the noise arose over all and continually increased. It grew louder — louder — *louder!* And still the men chatted pleasantly and smiled. Was it possible they heard not? Almighty God! — no, no! They heard! — they suspected! — they *knew!* — they were making a mockery of my horror! — this I thought, and this I think. But anything was better than this agony! Anything was more tolerable than this derision! I could bear those hypocritical smiles no longer! I felt that I must scream or die! — and now — again! — hark! louder! louder! louder! *louder!*

“Villains!” I shrieked, “dissemble no more! I admit the deed! — tear up the planks! — here, here! — it is the beating of his hideous heart!”

ELEONORA.¹

Sub conservatione formæ specificæ salva anima.

RAYMOND LULLY.²

I AM come of a race noted for vigor of fancy and ardor of passion. Men have called me mad; but the question is not yet settled, whether madness is or is not the loftiest intelligence — whether much that is glorious — whether all that is profound — does not spring from disease of thought — from *moods* of mind exalted at the expense of the general intellect. They who dream by day are cognizant of many things which escape those who dream only by night. In their gray visions they obtain glimpses of eternity, and thrill, in waking, to find that they have been upon the verge of the great secret. In snatches, they learn something of the wisdom which is of good, and more of the mere knowledge which is of evil. They penetrate, however rudderless or compassless, into the vast ocean of the “light ineffable,” and again, like the adventures of

¹ *Eleonora* was first published in *The Gift* for 1842. Both in style and in matter it may well be regarded as its author's most poetical tale. Nowhere has Poe given us more exquisite “harmonies of thought and sound and color,” — nowhere is his supernaturalism more ethereal and alluring. It should be read in connection with *Ligeia*, which is its sombre counterpart.

² Raymond Lully (1235–1315) was a native of Majorca, who, after a licentious life of some years, gave himself up to the idea of converting Mohammedans to Christianity. To this end he invented a fantastic system of logic, and endeavored to introduce the study of Arabic into Europe. The motto may be translated: “With the preservation of a specific form, the soul is safe.”

the Nubian geographer,¹ "*aggressi sunt mare tenebrarum, quid in eo esset exploraturi.*"

We will say, then, that I am mad.² I grant, at least, that there are two distinct conditions of my mental existence, the condition of a lucid reason, not to be disputed, and belonging to the memory of events forming the first epoch of my life; and a condition of shadow and doubt, appertaining to the present, and to the recollection of what constitutes the second great era of my being. Therefore what I shall tell of the earlier period, believe; and to what I may relate of the later time, give only such credit as may seem due; or doubt it altogether; or, if doubt it ye cannot, then play unto its riddle the *Œdipus*.³

She whom I loved in youth, and of whom I now pen calmly and distinctly these remembrances, was the sole daughter of the only sister of my mother long departed. Eleonora was the name of my cousin. We had always dwelled together, beneath a tropical sun, in the Valley of the Many-Colored Grass. No unguided footstep ever came upon that vale, for it lay far away up among a range of giant hills that hung beetling around about it, shutting out the sunlight from its sweetest recesses. No path was trodden

¹ The great Claudius Ptolemy (second century, A. D.). The Latin runs: "They entered the sea of darkness (*i. e.* the Atlantic), being about to explore what might be therein." The Poe texts all give "aggressi," which does not seem to be good Latin.

² See, on this general subject of the relations of genius to madness, Poe's "Fifty Suggestions," No. XXIII., and recall Dryden's famous couplet from *Absalom and Achitophel*:—

"Great wits are sure to madness near allied,
And thin partitions do their bounds divide."

³ That is, solve it. For the story of *Œdipus* and the Sphinx see *Harper's Classical Dictionary*.

in its vicinity; and to reach our happy home there was need of putting back with force the foliage of many thousands of forest trees, and of crushing to death the glories of many millions of fragrant flowers. Thus it was that we lived all alone, knowing nothing of the world without the valley, — I, and my cousin, and her mother.

From the dim regions beyond the mountains at the upper end of our encircled domain, there crept out a narrow and deep river, brighter than all save the eyes of Eleonora; and, winding stealthily about in mazy courses, it passed away at length through a shadowy gorge, among hills still dimmer than those whence it had issued. We called it the “River of Silence,” for there seemed to be a hushing influence in its flow. No murmur arose from its bed, and so gently it wandered along that the pearly pebbles upon which we loved to gaze, far down within its bosom, stirred not at all, but lay in a motionless content, each in its own old station, shining on gloriously forever.

The margin of the river, and of the many dazzling rivulets that glided through devious ways into its channel, as well as the spaces that extended from the margins away down into the depths of the streams until they reached the bed of pebbles at the bottom, — these spots, not less than the whole surface of the valley, from the river to the mountains that girdled it in, were carpeted all by a soft green grass, thick, short, perfectly even, and vanilla-perfumed, but so besprinkled throughout with the yellow buttercup, the white daisy, the purple violet, and the ruby-red asphodel, that its exceeding beauty spoke to our hearts in loud tones of the love and of the glory of God.

And here and there, in groves about this grass, like wildernesses of dreams, sprang up fantastic trees, whose tall, slender stems stood not upright, but slanted gracefully towards the light that peered at noonday into the centre of the valley. Their bark was speckled with the vivid alternate splendor of ebony and silver, and was smoother than all save the cheeks of Eleonora; so that but for the brilliant green of the huge leaves that spread from their summits in long, tremulous lines, dallying with the zephyrs, one might have fancied them giant serpents of Syria doing homage to their Sovereign the Sun.¹

Hand in hand about this valley, for fifteen years, roamed I with Eleonora before Love entered within our hearts. It was one evening at the close of the third lustrum² of her life, and of the fourth of my own, that we sat, locked in each other's embrace, beneath the serpent-like trees, and looked down within the waters of the River of Silence at our images therein. We spoke no words during the rest of that sweet day, and our words even upon the morrow were tremulous and few. We had drawn the god Eros³ from that wave, and now we felt that he had enkindled within us the fiery souls of our forefathers. The passions which had for centuries distinguished our race came thronging with the fancies for which they had been equally noted, and together breathed

¹ The editor has not been able to find the precise source of Poe's figure. Both sun-worship and serpent-worship existed among the Phœnicians.

² Every five years there was a lustration, or purification, of the Roman people; hence the term "lustrum" is used for any period of five years. The lovers were nearly fifteen and nearly twenty respectively.

³ That is, of Love. See *Classical Dictionary*.

a delirious bliss over the Valley of the Many-Colored Grass. A change fell upon all things. Strange, brilliant flowers, star-shaped, burst out upon the trees where no flowers had been known before. The tints of the green carpet deepened, and when, one by one, the white daisies shrank away, there sprang up, in place of them, ten by ten of the ruby-red asphodel. And life arose in our paths; for the tall flamingo, hitherto unseen, with all gay glowing birds, flaunted his scarlet plumage before us. The golden and silver fish haunted the river, out of the bosom of which issued, little by little, a murmur that swelled at length into a lulling melody more divine than that of the harp of Æolus,¹ sweeter than all save the voice of Eleonora. And now, too, a voluminous cloud, which we had long watched in the regions of Hesper,² floated out thence, all gorgeous in crimson and gold, and, settling in peace above us, sank day by day lower and lower until its edges rested upon the tops of the mountains, turning all their dimness into magnificence, and shutting us up as if forever within a magic prison-house of grandeur and of glory.

The loveliness of Eleonora was that of the Seraphim; but she was a maiden artless and innocent as the brief life she had led among the flowers. No guile disguised the fervor of love which animated her heart, and she examined with me its inmost recesses as we walked together in the Valley of the Many-Colored Grass, and discoursed of the mighty changes which had lately taken place therein.

¹ The king of storms and winds in classical mythology. His name is given to the Æolian harp or lyre, whose strings are moved by currents of air.

² That is, in the west, Hesperus being the evening star.

At length, having spoken one day, in tears, of the last sad change which must befall Humanity, she thenceforward dwelt only upon this one sorrowful theme, interweaving it into all our converse, as, in the songs of the bard of Schiraz,¹ the same images are found occurring again and again in every impressive variation of phrase.

She had seen that the finger of Death was upon her bosom, — that, like the ephemeron,² she had been made perfect in loveliness only to die; but the terrors of the grave to her lay solely in a consideration which she revealed to me one evening at twilight by the banks of the River of Silence. She grieved to think that, having entombed her in the Valley of the Many-Colored Grass, I would quit forever its happy recesses, transferring the love which now was so passionately her own to some maiden of the outer and every-day world. And then and there I threw myself hurriedly at the feet of Eleonora, and offered up a vow to herself and to Heaven that I would never bind myself in marriage to any daughter of Earth, — that I would in no manner prove recreant to her dear memory, or to the memory of the devout affection with which she had blessed me. And I called the Mighty Ruler of the Universe to witness the pious solemnity of my vow. And the curse which I invoked of Him and of her, a saint in Elusion,³ should I prove traitorous to that promise, involved a penalty the exceeding great horror of which will not permit

¹ Sadi, the celebrated Persian poet, whose long life extended from about 1184 to 1292 A. D.

² The creature of a day, — a short-lived insect. The student should look up its Greek derivation.

³ That is, Elysium.

me to make record of it here. And the bright eyes of Eleonora grew brighter at my words; and she sighed as if a deadly burden had been taken from her breast; and she trembled and very bitterly wept; but she made acceptance of the vow (for what was she but a child?), and it made easy to her the bed of her death. And she said to me, not many days afterwards, tranquilly dying, that, because of what I had done for the comfort of her spirit, she would watch over me in that spirit when departed, and, if so it were permitted her, return to me visibly in the watches of the night; but, if this thing were indeed beyond the power of the souls in Paradise, that she would at least give me frequent indications of her presence; sighing upon me in the evening winds, or filling the air which I breathed with perfume from the censers of the angels. And, with these words upon her lips, she yielded up her innocent life, putting an end to the first epoch of my own.

Thus far I have faithfully said. But as I pass the barrier in Time's path formed by the death of my beloved, and proceed with the second era of my existence, I feel that a shadow gathers over my brain, and I mistrust the perfect sanity of the record. But let me on. — Years dragged themselves along heavily, and still I dwelled within the Valley of the Many-Colored Grass; but a second change had come upon all things. The star-shaped flowers shrank into the stems of the trees, and appeared no more. The tints of the green carpet faded; and, one by one, the ruby-red asphodels withered away; and there sprang up in place of them, ten by ten, dark, eye-like violets, that writhed uneasily and were ever encumbered with dew. And Life departed from our paths; for the tall

flamingo flaunted no longer his scarlet plumage before us, but flew sadly from the vale into the hills, with all the gay glowing birds that had arrived in his company. And the golden and silver fish swam down through the gorge at the lower end of our domain, and bedecked the sweet river never again. And the lulling melody that had been softer than the wind-harp of Æolus, and more divine than all save the voice of Eleonora, it died little by little away, in murmurs growing lower and lower, until the stream returned, at length, utterly into the solemnity of its original silence; and then, lastly, the voluminous cloud uprose, and, abandoning the tops of the mountains to the dimness of old, fell back into the regions of Hesper, and took away all its manifold golden and gorgeous glories from the Valley of the Many-Colored Grass.¹

Yet the promises of Eleonora were not forgotten; for I heard the sounds of the swinging of the censers of the angels; and streams of a holy perfume floated ever and ever about the valley; and at lone hours, when my heart beat heavily, the winds that bathed my brow came unto me laden with soft sighs; and indistinct murmurs filled often the night air; and once — oh, but once only! — I was awakened from a slumber, like the slumber of death, by the pressing of spiritual lips upon my own.

But the void within my heart refused, even thus, to be filled. I longed for the love which had before filled it to overflowing. At length the valley *pained* me through its memories of Eleonora, and I left it

¹ This paragraph will afford an excellent opportunity for a study of the rhetorical device known as repetition.

forever for the vanities and the turbulent triumphs of the world.

I found myself within a strange city, where all things might have served to blot from recollection the sweet dreams I had dreamed so long in the Valley of the Many-Colored Grass. The pomps and pageantries of a stately court, and the mad clangor of arms, and the radiant loveliness of woman, bewildered and intoxicated my brain. But as yet my soul had proved true to its vows, and the indications of the presence of Eleonora were still given me in the silent hours of the night. Suddenly these manifestations — they¹ ceased, and the world grew dark before mine eyes, and I stood aghast at the burning thoughts which possessed, at the terrible temptations which beset me: for there came from some far, far distant and unknown land, into the gay court of the king I served, a maiden to whose beauty my whole recreant heart yielded at once, — at whose footstool I bowed down without a struggle, in the most ardent, in the most abject worship of love. What, indeed, was my passion for the young girl of the valley in comparison with the fervor, and the delirium, and the spirit-lifting ecstasy of adoration, with which I poured out my whole soul in tears at the feet of the ethereal Ermenгарde? Oh, bright was the seraph Ermengarde! and in that knowledge I had room for none other. Oh, divine was the angel Ermengarde! and as I looked down into the depths of her memorial² eyes, I thought only of them — and *of her*.

¹ Note the poetic effect of the use of the pronoun.

² Does Poe mean that her eyes had a far-away expression,

I wedded, nor dreaded the curse I had invoked; and its bitterness was not visited upon me. And once—but once again in the silence of the night—there came through my lattice the soft sighs which had forsaken me; and they modeled themselves into familiar and sweet voice saying:—

“Sleep in peace! for the Spirit of Love reigneth and ruleth, and, in taking to thy passionate heart her who is Ermengarde, thou art absolved, for reasons which shall be made known to thee in Heaven, of thy vows unto Eleonora.”

as though she were remembering the past, or that her eyes remind the speaker of Eleonora, or has the epithet any special meaning?



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